NATION

Punjab man lured to Russia with job promise dies in war

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Centre revokes NSA, Wangchuk walks out of jail after 6 months

NEW DELHI/JODHPUR/ LEH, 14 MARCH

Incarcerated for nearly six months, activist Sonam Wangchuk was released from the Jodhpur Central Jail on Saturday afternoon, hours after the Centre announced its decision to revoke his detention under the National Security Act, a move welcomed by political parties and protesting Ladakh outfits.

Wangchuk, 59, was detained on 26 September 2025 under the NSA as per an order issued by the Leh district magistrate, two days after violent protests erupted during a stir by the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, leaving four people dead.

The activist was kept in Jodhpur Central Jail, where he had already undergone nearly half of the detention period stipulated under the Act, according to a statement issued by the Centre announcing the decision to revoke his detention "with immediate effect."

"He was released from jail at about 1.30 pm today," Ratanada Police Station SHO Dinesh Lakhawat said in Jodhpur, adding that his wife, Geetanjali Angmo, was there to complete formalities.

The decision, which the Centre said was intended to foster peace in Ladakh to facilitate a constructive dialogue with all stakeholders, comes days after the Supreme Court adjourned to 17 March the hearing on a plea filed by the activist's wife challenging his detention. The government reiterated its commitment to peace, stability and trust in Ladakh to facilitate a constructive dialogue with all stakeholders.

Two days ago, Wangchuk had written on X that a just future for Ladakh would require sincere talks.

Vivek Tankha, Congress leader and Wangchuk's lawyer, asserted that he is a nationalist and his role will be crucial for Ladakh's security and stability. *— PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

K'taka to form SIT to identify forest, revenue land

MANGALURU, 14 MARCH

Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on Saturday said a Special Investigation Team (SIT) will be constituted at the district level to identify forest and revenue land in compliance with Supreme Court directions. Speaking after inaugurating the Mulki taluk Administrative Centre 'Praja Soudha', Gowda said the long-pending classification issue had caused hardship to farmers and the government was addressing it on priority. Joint surveys are being conducted to demarcate forest and revenue land earlier granted to farmers. He said plotting for 1,948 beneficiaries was completed between 2018 and 2023, while 60,943 beneficiaries received plots under the 1-5 scheme in the last two years, with 23,620 issued pahani documents. Title deeds were distributed to 2.20 lakh beneficiaries. Land records are now available online, and 73 crore pages have been scanned across the state. *—PTI*

B'luru to make 3,000T biogas to offset LPG crisis

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) is planning to expand biogas making by treating nearly 3,000 tonnes of wet waste produced each day in the City, said sources. According to sources, officials believe that this step could ease the current shortage of LPG supplies. GBA Chief Commissioner Maheshwar Rao said that to process waste into cooking fuel and electricity, initiatives will be taken to increase biogas plants within Bengaluru. After an inspection of Koramangala's waste-to-energy facility, he said that a detailed study will be done to boost biogas generation and to establish decentralised processing plants across Bengaluru. Two to three acres of land will be taken up for each decentralised facility. The existing facilities will be expanded to make biogas and supply it to nearby hotels. For effective processing, proper segregation of wet and dry waste is important, Rao said. He urged citizens to segregate their waste before handovers. Additionally, Bengaluru is also setting up four decentralised biomethanisation plants. Biomethanisation is a crucial component of Bengaluru's solid waste management, said Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited (BSWML) CEO Kareegowda. *—Agencies*

—FREEPIK

'DO NOT HOARD'

LPG supply a concern, no fertiliser shortage: Centre

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The Centre on Saturday said liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) remains "a matter of concern at this time" amid the West Asia conflict but assured that no distribution centre has run dry and that supplies of crude oil, petrol, diesel and LPG remain adequate.

At an inter-ministerial media briefing, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India also has sufficient fertiliser stocks for the upcoming Kharif season.

He said India's partners have assured New Delhi of uninterrupted fertiliser supplies despite the tensions in West Asia.

Meanwhile, LPG bookings have risen sharply. Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary (Marketing and Oil Refinery) in the Petroleum Ministry, said bookings have increased to nearly 88 lakh. She said crude oil supplies remain stable and refineries are operating at full capacity, while governments and district administrations are closely monitoring the fuel supply situation.

Consumers must maintain a 25-day gap between LPG bookings in urban areas and 45 days in rural areas, she added.

Commercial LPG cylinder distribution has resumed in 29 states and Union Territories, while authorities are conducting raids and surprise inspections to curb hoarding and black marketing.

The government has also asked GAIL to direct city gas distribution operators to provide piped natural gas connections to commercial consumers.

The Petroleum Ministry has advised people not to store fuel in loose or inappropriate containers after a video showing a man filling a plastic water jar with fuel at a petrol pump in Tamil Nadu went viral. *—Agencies*

People queue up to collect domestic LPG cylinders in Bengaluru on Saturday *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

Indian warships escort LPG tankers out of Hormuz

2 ships with 92,700 tonne of LPG to reach India

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Two Indian vessels carrying liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from Gulf countries crossed the Strait of Hormuz early on Saturday, raising the number of Indian ships that have safely passed through the conflict-hit shipping lane to three.

This comes as three Indian Navy warships have reportedly reached the Gulf of Oman to escort merchant vessels through the sensitive sea lane.

The LPG carriers Shivalik and Nanda Devi are now headed to Mundra and Kandla ports in Gujarat, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, said at a media briefing. The ships are carrying 92,700 tonnes of LPG, with Shivalik expected to reach Mundra on 16 March and Nanda Devi likely to dock at Kandla the following day.

The strait has effectively remained closed since the first week of March following attacks by the United States and Israel on Iran and retaliatory actions by Tehran.

India had 28 Indian-flagged vessels stranded in the region when the conflict escalated, 24 on the western side of the Strait of Hormuz and four on the eastern side.

Of the remaining 22 vessels still on the western side, six are LPG carriers, one is a liquefied natural gas (LNG) carrier, four are crude oil tankers, one carries chemical products, three are container ships and two are bulk carriers. One vessel is a dredger and another is empty, while three others are in dry dock for routine maintenance.

These ships together have 611 seafarers on board, while three vessels on the eastern side carry 76 crew members, officials said. The remaining Indian ships on the western side of the strait are currently on standby as the government engages with countries in the region to ensure safe passage.

India imports about 60 per cent of its LPG requirement, and 85–90 per cent of these supplies come from Gulf nations. Addressing the briefing, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India is coordinating closely with regional governments to ensure safe and uninterrupted transit.

"Several of our ships remain on standby in the Gulf region. We propose to continue to remain in touch and coordinate with all concerned countries to ensure safe transit and protect our energy security," he said.

At the same time, US President Donald Trump said several countries could deploy warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open. In a post on Truth Social, he said nations affected by Iran's attempted closure of the strait would send naval vessels in coordination with the United States.

Trump said he hoped China, France, Japan, South Korea and Britain would join the effort to secure the key shipping route. *—PTI*

>>More on Pgs 2, 3, 4, 6 & 7

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-15

UAE CARGO VESSEL REACHES KARWAR

KARWAR, 14 March

A cargo vessel from the United Arab Emirates carrying bitumen has reached the Karwar commercial port, becoming the first ship to arrive at the port since the outbreak of the Iran war, officials said. The vessel, Cheng X, carrying around 3,100 metric tonnes of bitumen, arrived at the commercial harbour on Friday afternoon. The ship has a total carrying capacity of about 5,500 tonnes, an official said on condition of anonymity. The vessel departed from Khor Fakkan in the UAE on 3 March and reached Karwar after a voyage of nearly two weeks. The arrival comes amid escalating tensions in West Asia and warnings from Iran about the possible closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which has disrupted maritime traffic along Gulf routes.

Officials said the ship's arrival has brought some relief amid delays in supplies of petroleum products and raw bitumen from Gulf countries to India. *—SALAR NEWS*

US BEGGING INDIA TO BUY RUSSIAN OIL: IRAN

DUBAI, 14 MARCH

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said the US, despite "bullying India" to end Russian oil imports, is now begging them to buy crude from Moscow, two weeks after its war with Iran.

"The US spent months on bullying India into ending oil imports from Russia," said Araghchi on Friday in a post on social media platform X.

"After two weeks of war with Iran, White House is now begging the world — including India — to buy Russian crude," he added.

This comes after, on March 5, the US issued a 30-day waiver allowing India to buy Russian oil, having previously imposed heavy sanctions related to the war in Ukraine. *—PTI*

'COPS MUST QUIT IF NOT COMPETENT'

Cannot restrict no. of people offering namaz: HC

PRAYAGRAJ, 14 MARCH

The Allahabad High Court has said it is the duty of the state to ensure that every religious community can hold prayers peacefully at a designated place of worship or on private property without requiring permission.

A bench of Justices Atul Sreedharan and Siddharth Nandan made the observations while rejecting the decision of the administration in Uttar Pradesh to restrict the number of persons offering namaz during the holy month of Ramadan at a mosque in Sambhal district.

The court also said that if the Superintendent of Police and Collector felt unable to enforce the rule of law, they should either resign or seek a transfer.

The court said that if the SP and Collector felt unable to enforce the rule of law, they should either resign or seek a transfer *—ANI*

The petition was filed by a man who alleged that he was being prevented from conducting prayers during Ramadan at a plot where he claimed a mosque existed.

However, the bench noted that the petitioner had not submitted photographs showing the presence of a mosque or place of worship where prayers were to be offered.

During the hearing, the state government disputed the ownership of the plot, stating that revenue records show it in the names of Mohan Singh and Bhooraj Singh, both sons of Sukhi Singh.

Authorities had permitted only 20 persons to offer namaz at the site citing a "perceived law and order situation".

Rejecting the argument, the court said it was the state's duty to ensure that the rule of law prevails under all circumstances.

The bench added that permission is required only when prayers or religious functions are held on public land or spill over onto public property.

The matter has been listed for further hearing on Monday. *—PTI*

Man allegedly stabs twin sister 84 times in UP

- On 6 March, after a conversation with his sister, Hardik stabbed her to death.

LUCKNOW, 14 MARCH

An engineer stabbed his twin sister 84 times till she died after an argument over his interfaith relationship. The accused, Hardik, 25, attempted to kill his mother too.

Hardik was earlier in love with a Muslim whom he had befriended on social media. He used to work in Gurugram but quit and started spending chatting till late at night. Concerned, his mother and sister started advising him.

On 6 March, after a conversation between Hardik and his sister, Himashikha, Hardik stabbed her to death. The autopsy report said that there were 84 wounds on Himashikha's body.

After killing his sister, Hardik visited his mother Neelima at her workplace. "I have a surprise for you," he told his mother.

At home Neelima was shocked to see her daughter dead. When she screamed, her son attacked her too. She is out of danger now.

Hardik told cops that constant advice had turned him against his sister and mother. *— Agencies*

Karnataka Bioenergy Development Board Chairman SE Sudheendra inaugurated the annual function of Kangaroo Kids, an international school in Uttarahalli, Bengaluru on Saturday—*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Give hotels 20% LPG: Mysuru Hoteliers

The association warns that thousands of people are affected by closure of hotels, restaurants

Workers unload domestic LPG cylinders from a truck at a gas agency as people queue up to collect them at Bengaluru's Jayamahal; IDC hotel remains closed due to a shortage of commercial LPG —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

MYSURU/BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

Mysuru hotel owners urged the Karnataka government to divert at least 20 per cent of the LPG supplied to the State to the hotel sector.

Speaking to reporters, Mysuru Hotel Owners Association President M Narayanagowda said that due to the hotel closure tomato rates fell to Rs 3 per kg while onion rates to Rs 10 per kg.

He warned that if the State government makes the industry wait for a few more days, the entire economy will feel the heat.

Among the 1,500 hotels in Mysuru, around 10 percent of them have closed due to the non-availability of commercial cylinders, he said.

Even though Mysuru hotels are continuing to serve using other fuel sources such as electric stoves or firewood, the scarcity of commercial cylinders has affected their business, Narayanagowda said.

About 13 lakh people involved directly and indirectly in this hotel business will be affected by the crisis if the issue continues, the association said in a bulletin, noting that about 25,000 labourers were also involved in the hotel business in Mysuru and around 3 lakh in Bengaluru.

"The life of these labourers will also be miserable if the government fails to initiate measures," Narayanagowda said.

"Dosa making hotels are the worst hit."

Narayanagowda also warned that tourism will also take a hit in Mysuru if the State government neglects to ensure commercial cylinders to hotels.

Mysuru city attracts 50,000 tourists on regular days and about 2-3 lakh tourists on weekends. The booking in the hotels and rooms have also been hit, he said.

The State government has said that the issue may take up to 10 days to resolve.

B'LURU HOTEL OWNER WRITES TO PM

Roopa Shastri, the owner of Rasapaka Hotel in Bengaluru's Gandhinagar, has written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on behalf of women entrepreneurs. She also requested special attention to the hotels run by women. "With a more than 50 per cent reduction in the supply of commercial cylinders, it is becoming impossible to run hotels," she wrote in the letter.

—*Salar News with Agencies*

316 LPG cylinders seized in Kolar

The Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Department seized 316 domestic LPG cylinders allegedly being used for commercial purposes. A case was registered against a gas agency shop in KGF, Kolar district, which was conducting illegal refilling of gas cylinders, a state authority said.

Lokayukta finds ₹8.69 cr assets in Udupi raids

UDUPI, 14 MARCH

The Lokayukta conducted simultaneous raids at 15 locations linked to Udupi District Excise Deputy Commissioner TM Srinivas, on suspicion of possessing assets disproportionate to his known income. The operation, led by Lokayukta Mangaluru Division Superintendent of Police Dinesh Kumar, uncovered assets worth Rs 8.69 crore. The officials said immovable properties valued at Rs 6.90 crore were identified, including 11 residential sites, six well-furnished houses, and approximately 31 acres of agricultural land. Movable assets worth Rs 2.66 crore were also recovered. The raids were based on credible information that Srinivas had accumulated assets exceeding his legitimate income. —*Salar News*

— PTI

DJ held for bomb remark at Bengaluru Airport

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

A disc jockey has been detained after allegedly making a bomb threat remark at Kempegowda International Airport in the City following an argument with airline staff. Rajatesh Bera, 40, from North 24 Parganas, West Bengal, was scheduled to fly from Bengaluru to Raipur but was denied entry for arriving late. During the dispute, he reportedly said that the flight would stop if there was a bomb inside the aircraft. The comment triggered security concerns, leading to his detention and a bomb threat assessment. Bera claimed he was trying to board urgently as his father was unwell. —*PTI*

Five contract staff arrested for digital signature fraud

CHITRADURGA, 14 MARCH

Police have arrested five contract employees for allegedly misusing the digital signatures of senior district officials to create fake bills worth about Rs 15 lakh in Chitradurga. The accused—Vinay Sharma, Vijay Kumar, Basavaraj, Mehboob Basha and Venkatesh—worked in the Urban Development Department. Another suspect, Syed Sadiq, is absconding. Police said the group prepared fraudulent bills related to Urban Development works using forged digital signatures of the District Commissioner and Additional District Commissioner and submitted them to district treasury. Treasury officials detected irregularities during verification & alerted authorities. —*Salar News*

GOVT WARNS AGAINST LPG HOARDING

TUMAKURU, 14 MARCH

Home Minister **G Parameshwara** on Saturday said the police have been instructed to take legal action against those involved in hoarding and black marketing of LPG cylinders. Amid supply constraints caused by the West Asia conflict, he expressed hope that the supplies would be restored at the earliest.

He said in Tumakuru that instruct2ions have been given to police across the State.

"The shortage of commercial cylinders is throughout the country...The Prime Minister and the Central government have assured us that they will supply," Parameshwara noted.

Other Congress leaders took a sharper tone against the Centre.

"This crisis has been formulated by the BJP. This is nothing but a disastrous policy by the Central government. What was the need for Modi to visit Israel two days prior to the war? What did he achieve?" IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge told press in Bidar. "If there is no crisis why is the Essential Services Maintenance Act invoked?" he asked.

Similarly, Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre said that the Centre should've anticipated the crisis and prepared for it. "Everybody knew what was going to happen and they (Centre and Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri) should have anticipated this situation," he said.

—*Agencies*

War for oil, not democracy: CPI(M)

MYSURU, 14 MARCH

Members of the CPI(M) protested in Mysuru on Saturday protested the US and Israeli attacks on Iran, and said the attacks were by capitalist countries seeking to exploit natural resources from an oil-rich nation and not establish democracy or stop nuclear proliferation like US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had claimed.

Calling for international peacekeeping organisations like the UN to intervene, the protesters said that the US and Israeli forces must stop killing women, children and other civilians by attacking schools, hospitals and educational institutions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi should also attempt to end the war, the demonstrators demanded. CPI(M) District Secretary Jagadeesh Surya, Socialist Unity Centre of India District Secretary Ravi, Ramakrishna, progressive personalities Savitha Mallesh, T Gururaj, Odanadi Stanely, Riatha Sangha leader Hosakote Basavaraj, Prof Kalachannegowda were present among others. —*Salar News*

CPI(M) protests against the US and Union government over LPG scarcity in India at Freedom Park in Bengaluru, on Saturday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

PRICE CRASH IN MYSURU

With around 10% of the hotels in Mysuru closing, vegetable prices have crashed:

Tomatoe are being sold for ₹3 in Mysuru

Onions are being sold for ₹10

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy, MP Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, former prime minister HD Deve Gowda met Union Minister of Commerce Piyush Goyal on Saturday —*X @HD_KUMARASWAMY*

State should give Rs 30-Rs 50 incentive to tobacco farmers: JD(S)

MYSURU, 14 MARCH

Amid rising concern among tobacco growing farmers in Karnataka over their livelihood in the wake of recent hike in excise duty on cigarettes by the Centre, JD(S) Working President SR Mahesh on Saturday urged the Union and State governments to come to the rescue of the farmers.

Speaking to reporters in Mysuru, Mahesh said the tobacco farmers are facing hardship due to steep fall in tobacco prices. He noted that a large number of farmers were cultivating tobacco in five taluks of Mysuru district.

Local Member of Parliament Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy, former prime minister HD Deve Gowda earlier met Union Minister of Commerce Piyush Goyal and demanded that the government exported tobacco to 190 countries where Indian tobacco is in high demand.

Mahesh further demanded the intervention of the State Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to protect the interest of the growers in his home district.

He demanded the state government provide Rs 30 to Rs 50 per kg incentives on tobacco purchase.

He also said the Indian Tobacco Company (ITC), a major buyer, should be allowed to directly buy the tobacco grown by the farmers of the region.

Many tobacco growers who were indulging in distressed sales have attempted suicides in Periyapatna, Hunsur, and several other taluks of the district, Mahesh added. —*Salar News*

State clears ₹4,824 cr projects, creates 14,525 jobs

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

The State government has approved industrial projects costing Rs 4,824.31 crore, which will generate 14,525 new jobs, Industries Minister MB Patil said.

The 158th State Level Single Window Approval Committee meeting approved an investment of Rs 4,824.31 crore in 37 new industries and 2 additional investment projects in the 13 districts of Vijayapura, Bagalkot, Chitradurga, Kolar, and Ramanagara, the minister's office said in a release on Saturday.

"The approved projects in IT infrastructure, sugar manufacturing, technical textiles, compressed biogas, aerospace, jewellery production, electronics, software, and five-star hotel will generate 14,525 new jobs," the release quoted Patil as saying on Friday.

Among the projects approved, 22 are major large and medium industrial projects totalling Rs 3,908.68 crore, generating 12,475 jobs; 15 are new projects with investments ranging from Rs 15 crore to Rs 50 crore, totalling Rs 350.60 crore, providing 1,750 jobs.

Two are additional investment projects amounting to Rs 565.03 crore, creating 300 jobs.

Some of the major approved projects are the Bagmane Constructions Private Limited's IT infrastructure development projects worth Rs 494.65 crore; Karnataka Bangaru Sugars Pvt Ltd's sugar factory with an investment of Rs 443.50 crore; Kleine Pax technical textile unit worth Rs 376 crore; Trishul Buildtech and Infrastructure's five-star hotel worth Rs 300 crore. — *PTI*

The Committee meeting approved an investment of Rs 4,824.31 crore in 37 new industries & 2 additional projects in 13 districts —*X @MBPATIL*

'Cong ready for upcoming Bagalkot, Davangere bypolls'

BAGALKOTE, 14 MARCH

Chief Minister **Siddaramaiah** on Saturday asserted that the Congress is ready for the upcoming by-election to the Bagalkote and Davangere South Assembly constituencies.

Bypolls for the Bagalkot and Davanagere South assembly constituencies are necessitated following the deaths of sitting Congress MLAs HY Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa, respectively. "The preparations for the bypolls are completed. We are ready for the byelection," Siddaramaiah said in response to a question.

Stating that the Congress high command will decide the candidates for the bypolls, the CM said, "In Bagalkot, late HY Meti's family members are also strong aspirants. It is not wrong to have aspirations; we (State leaders) will consider all aspects and recommend a candidate. The high command will make the final decision." The bypoll date may be announced within a week, he added. —*PTI*

AMID MEDIA BACKLASH

Bank credits 66P to farmer to clear loan

HASSAN, 14 MARCH

In an incident highlighting peculiar banking procedures, a branch of Canara Bank in Sakleshpur has finally credited 66 paise to a farmer's account to close a loan-related issue after the matter drew media attention. The farmer, Chokkannagowda, is from Hosa Koppalu village in Sakleshpur taluk of Hassan district.

Chokkannagowda said that authorities often ignore those who default on loans worth crores and flee the country, while small farmers who repay their loans face unnecessary difficulties. The farmer had taken a loan of Rs 50,000 from the bank last year. He had already repaid the loan along with interest. However, on 25 February, he received a call from the bank stating that Rs 9.34 was still pending in his loan account.

Upon visiting the Sakleshpur branch to settle his account with Rs 10, Chokkannagowda found the bank had only credited Rs 9.34, retaining the remaining 66 paise. The farmer contested the discrepancy, but the bank finalised the transaction and issued a receipt for the smaller amount.

Only after the issue was reported in the media did the bank eventually credit the 66 paise to the farmer's account, thereby closing the matter.

When contacted, bank officials claimed that the call asking him to repay the remaining amount of Rs 9.34 paise was not made directly by branch staff but was generated via a computerised tele-calling system. —*Salar News*

1978 BWSSB case: SC to hear on 'industry' definition

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

A nine-judge SC Constitution bench is slated to commence hearing on 17 March the issue of defining the word "industry" under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

This would include examining the test laid down in paragraphs 140 to 144 in the opinion rendered by Justice VR Krishna Iyer in the BWSSB case (1978) to determine if an undertaking falls within the definition of 'industry' is correct.

According to the court's cause list of 17 March, the matter would be heard by a nine-judge bench comprising CJI Surya Kant and Justices BV Nagarathna, PS Narasimha, Dipankar Datta, Ujjal Bhuyan, Satish Chandra Sharma, Joymalya Bagchi, Alok Aradhe and Vipul M Pancholi.

On 16 February, the court had formulated the broad issues to be adjudicated by the nine-judge bench.

"This includes whether the Industrial Disputes (Amendment) Act, 1982 (which seemingly did not come into force), and the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, (with effect from 21 November, 2025), have any impact on the interpretation of the expression 'industry' as contained in the principal Act?" the bench had asked. —*PTI*

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TMC protects 'rapists': PM tears into Didi

The Prime Minister unveiled Rs 18,680 cr projects in WB, Rs 23,550 cr projects in Assam

KOLKATA, 14 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday accused the ruling TMC of 'protecting rapists', citing the Sandeshkhali and brutality faced by a student at the RG Kar Medical College and Hostel.

He said that TMC shielded the accused and that women in West Bengal will be safe under a BJP government, if voted to power.

Addressing a rally at the Brigade Parade Ground here, Modi said the state government opposed the SIR of electoral rolls to "protect infiltrators", alleging that unchecked illegal immigration under its rule had altered the demographic balance in several parts o.f the state.

He unveil development projects worth around Rs 18,680 crore in the state.

About 63.66 lakh names have been deleted since the SIR process began in November last year, reducing the voter base in the state from about 7.66 crore to just over 7.04 crore.

Bengal BJP President Samik Bhattacharya, Governor RN Ravi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and LoP in the state Assembly Suvendu Adhikari during the inauguration of development projects in Kolkata on Saturday —PTI

TMC alleged that the process is aimed at disenfranchising genuine voters.

Modi also accused the ruling TMC of insulting President Droupadi Murmu, alleging that the party had disrespected the country's tribals and the Constitution.

The Prime Minister also unveiled projects worth Rs 23,550 crore in Assam's Silchar town on Saturday, ahead of the Assembly elections.

He also took part in the 'bhoomi poojan' for the Rs 22,864-crore access-controlled expressway between Silchar in Cachar district and Shillong in Meghalaya, the first of its kind in the Northeast.

Asserting a meeting in Silchar, he said that while the government was working to minimise the impacts of the West Asia conflict on the people the Opposition Congress was acting "irresponsibly" by trying to create panic in the country.

Modi alleged that the Congress had ignored the development of the Northeast for decades, and allowed a drawing of the border during Independence that cut off Barak Valley's access to the sea. Modi also slammed the Congress's shirtless protest at the AI Impact Summit. —PTI

TMC, BJP workers clash in Kolkata

Clashes broke out between TMC and BJP supporters in Kolkata on Saturday, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally at the Brigade Parade Ground, leaving a police officer and BJP leader Tamaghno Ghosh injured. The violence erupted about 5 km from the rally venue as BJP supporters marched to Brigade Parade Ground for Modi's meeting, marking the end of the BJP's campaign for the Assembly polls. Stones were also thrown at West Bengal Minister Shashi Panja's home. —PTI

'Suresh Gopi offered me BJP ticket from Kerala'

KERALA, 14 MARCH

Former India football star IM Vijayan on Saturday said he declined offers from several political parties to contest the upcoming Assembly elections. However, he said he would consider accepting a Rajya Sabha nomination if an offer came. Speaking to reporters here, Vijayan said Union Minister Suresh Gopi had recently offered him a BJP ticket to contest the election from Thrissur. He said a BJP representative from Delhi had urged him to contest the election, adding that he received similar offers from Congress and LDF. "I declined them because I want the love of all the people. I have no commitment to any party. ," he said. Vijayan represented India in international football tournament. —PTI

Himalayan tree cover shrunk by 2.2 % in 2 yrs: Govt

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The tree cover in the Indian Himalayan region has shrunk by 2.27 per cent between 2021 and 2023. In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha on Friday, Union minister Kirti Vardhan Singh stated that according to the India State of Forest Report (ISFR), the tree cover in the region fell from 15,427.11 sq km in 2021 to 15,075.5 sq km in 2023. Forest carbon stock in the Indian Himalayan region was 3,273.10 million tonnes in 2023, from 3,272.68 million tonnes in 2021. Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Assam and West Bengal are part of Himalayan region. —PTI

—PTI

Delhi Holi clash: MCH demolishes illegal structures

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

An anti-encroachment drive was carried out in Delhi's Uttam Nagar on Saturday, with civic officials sealing several eateries in the area. Teams of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, assisted by the Delhi Police, launched the action amid tight security arrangements, deploying bulldozers to remove alleged illegal structures and seal shops violating civic norms. The action comes days after Tarun, 26, was killed in a clash that broke out between his family and neighbours in JJ Colony. According to police, the violence started after water from a balloon thrown by a girl from Tarun's family splashed the neighbour's family during Holi celebrations. The incident had triggered tensions and demands for strict action against illegal establishments. —PTI

4 Cong cadres held over pamphlets against Himanta

GUWAHATI, 14 MARCH

Four Assam Congress workers have been arrested for allegedly possessing and transporting "provocative and inflammatory" pamphlets containing allegations against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, with the opposition party questioning the charges and calling the action undemocratic. According to police, the accused were found in possession of posters and pamphlets meant for mass distribution that allegedly contained "provocative, inflammatory and scandalous allegations" under the headline 'Chargesheet against the Chief Minister', which could disturb public tranquillity and the electoral atmosphere. The Congress asserted that the pamphlets contained allegations that were part of a 20-point "charge sheet" released on February 19 by the party's Assam unit ahead of the assembly election. A case was registered. —PTI

BJP's Padmaja invites K Sudhakaran to join party

THRISSUR, 14 MARCH

BJP leader Padmaja Venugopal on Saturday invited the senior **Congress leader and Kannur MP, K Sudhakaran**, to join the saffron party.

Venugopal, the daughter of Congress stalwart K Karunakaran, who herself left Congress to join the BJP, also said she was "not surprised" by how Congress was treating Sudhakaran, just like it had "sidelined" her.

She also said that a person like Sudhakaran joining the BJP was the need of the times. Wherever he goes, he will get a seat to contest in the upcoming polls, she added.

Her remarks come in the wake of speculative reports that Sudhakaran, is not happy with the All India Congress Committee's decision not to allow sitting MPs to contest in the Assembly polls.

The speculations arose from his emotional Facebook post in which he narrated his close connection to Kannur.

Venugopal will not contest in the Assembly polls from Thrissur constituency, as being in the BJP has given her more confidence of a win.

Meanwhile, CPI(M) MLA H Salam on Saturday said senior leader G Sudhakaran leaving the party and contesting as an independent from the Ambalapuzha constituency will not have any impact on the party.

G Sudhakaran recently decided not to renew his party membership after alleging that he was attacked by party cadres on social media platforms.

Salam is the current MLA of Ambalapuzha and is likely to contest again as the CPI(M) candidate in the upcoming Assembly election.

Salam said the Left Democratic Front would face the election strongly regardless of the candidate. —PTI

'BJP behind SC's Sabarimala entry verdict'

Kerala Devaswom Minister VN Vasavan on Saturday blamed the BJP for the 2018 Supreme Court verdict permitting women's entry into Sabarimala and said the LDF government's current stand remains the same as the affidavit filed before SC in 2007. The state government will file an affidavit before SC clarifying its position on the entry of women of menstruating age into the hill shrine. "The issue should be decided by experts in ritualistic matters. The government is with the devotees," he said. —PTI

Cong to decide if MPs can contest Kerala Assembly polls

T'PURAM, 14 MARCH

Congress General Secretary KC Venugopal on Saturday said that some party MPs from Kerala are interested in contesting in the upcoming state Assembly elections, but the high command would decide.

Venugopal said that the central election committee has finalised several names for the upcoming polls and a few more remain to be decided. The screening committee will announce its decision soon.

Venugopal, the MP from Alappuzha parliamentary constituency, rejected the reports that party veteran K Sudhakaran was unhappy and said his recent Facebook post only expressed his love for Kannur and the grand old party.

He also said that he cannot term someone's wish to contest in the polls as "a huge wrong".

Regarding reports of Sudhakaran being invited to join the BJP, Venugopal said that "they will have to find someone else".

He further said that the goal of everyone in the party was to ensure the victory of the UDF in the Assembly polls. —PTI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the 'Badlav' rally in Moga in Punjab on Saturday —PTI

BJP to contest 2027 polls solo in 'drug free' Punjab

MOGA, 14 MARCH

Kicking off the BJP's campaign for the 2027 assembly elections in Punjab's Monga district, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday urged people to give the party a chance in the Assembly poll which it intends to fight alone.

He hit out at the alleged misrule of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann led AAP government in the state.

With this the BJP top leader also put an end to all speculations about any likely pre-poll tie up with its former ally Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) for the 2027 elections.

"Earlier, whenever we contested in Punjab, we came here as chhota bhai (younger brother). But today, let me clarify that we will contest in Punjab to form our own government in 2027," Shah said.

Shah launched a broadside against the Mann government over deteriorating law and order situation, drug menace, religious conversion and corruption and alleged that it has become an "ATM" for AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, as he appealed to voters to give one chance to the BJP to form a government in 2027 polls to bring about a change in the state.

Shah promised that drug trade will be rooted out. —PTI

DU slams Rahul's caste discrimination remarks

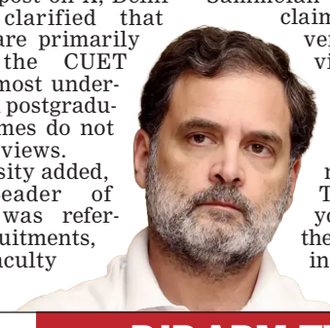
NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The University of Delhi has dismissed **Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's** remarks alleging that the university uses interviews as a method to eliminate students based on caste.

The university stated that Gandhi should have verified facts before making such claims. In a post on X, Delhi University clarified that admissions are primarily based on the CUET scores, and most undergraduate and postgraduate programmes do not include interviews.

The university added, "If the Leader of Opposition was referring to recruitments, such as faculty positions, the University has recently recruited thousands of teachers across all categories." Delhi University also urged Gandhi to verify facts before making such statements, asserting that his comments create a non-conducive environment.

The statement came after Gandhi, during an event called 'Samvidhaan Sammelan' in Lucknow, claimed that the university uses interviews to eliminate students based on caste, saying, "An interview is a method to eliminate students. They ask what your caste is, and then you fail in the interview." —PTI



Modi govt sacrificed farmers for its own interest: Rahul

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has accused the BJP-led government of failing to honour promises made to farmers and being willing to sacrifice India's agriculture for its own interests.

In a Facebook post, Gandhi shared a question he recently asked in the Lok Sabha regarding the announcement of a minimum support price (MSP) for crops and whether a trade deal with the United States would impact the government's existing MSP policy.

Gandhi stated, "In the Lok Sabha, I asked a direct question: Why has the promise of a statutory MSP — calculated at C2+50 per cent — made to farmers in 2021, not yet been implemented?" —PTI

Over 2L children in Gujarat are malnourished: Govt tells Assembly

GANDHINAGAR, 14 MARCH

More than 2 lakh children across 20 of Gujarat's 34 districts are suffering from malnutrition, the state government informed the legislative assembly on Saturday.

Replying to questions raised by Congress MLAs during Question Hour, Women and Child Development Minister Manisha Vakil said that as of January 2026, a total of 2.05 lakh malnourished children had been recorded in these districts. Of them, nearly 1.69 lakh were classified as 'underweight', while 36,805 were categorised as 'severely underweight'.

According to data presented in the House, the tribal-dominated Panchmahal district reported the highest number of malnourished children at 20,762. It was followed by Banaskantha (19,391), Kheda (18,590), Sabarkantha (16,588), Dahod (16,388), Chhotaudepur (16,322), Narmada (8,881) and Mahisagar (7,838).

Tapi district recorded the lowest number at 4,424 cases. Urban districts Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar reported 6,411 and 6,467 cases respectively.

In the past year, 1,164 new malnourished children were added in Kheda and Chhotaudepur, while nearly 1.59 lakh cases declined across the 20 districts.

"The state government is taking various steps to end malnutrition. Fortified nutritious food is provided to children in all Anganwadi centres.

Moreover, women receive nutritious food for 1,000 days before and after birth for the sake of the children's health," Vakil said. —PTI

BJP ARM-TWISTING TVK?

TVK leaders split on alliances as NDA pact buzz grows

CHENNAI, 14 MARCH

TVK's internal discussions, led by **party General Secretary N Anand** were ongoing to explore bringing together "Vijay's charisma and the strength of seasoned parties," to provide electoral synergy and ensure a magical victory.

Among the points being debated is the electoral viability of TVK joining hands with the AIADMK-BJP combine "to replicate in Tamil Nadu the Pawan Kalyan-led Janasena-TDP government model" of neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.

Sections within the party make a strong pitch to go solo.

BJP State Chief Nainar Nagenthran declined to comment on talks for an alliance with TVK, furthering guesswork on social media.

Dismissing negotiations for an alliance with NDA as "rumours," TVK's Joint General Secretary CTR Nirmal Kumar said that the virtual meeting with the party's district secretaries was to assess the strengths and alliance prospects.

There are speculation on social media about several "alliance hypothesis" revolving

TVK and its cadres, who are active participants in the online communities.

Speculations are rife in political circles that the Saffron party is allegedly "arm-twisting" Vijay to join the NDA by misusing the 'Jana Nayagan' film certification issue and the CBI probe into the Karur stampede.

Several party enthusiasts said the TVK continues to 'dominate the political discourse'. When the claims and counter-claims over the strong possibility of Congress-TVK alliance reached peak, "Vijay's wife Sankgeetha's divorce petition in court," emerged and rivals gave traction to such a personal matter.

Despite TVK projecting Vijay as the CM face, and promising to share power if it wins, no political outfit has joined it. BJP's K Annamalai said it was TVK that sought a CBI probe into the Karur tragedy. —PTI

DMK threatened actor Rajnikanth: TVK leader

CHENNAI, 14 MARCH

TVK leader Aadhav Arjuna has stoked a controversy claiming that the DMK "threatened" **Tamil film superstar Rajinikanth** when he tried to enter politics, and his remark resulted in a strong backlash from the top actor's fans and former advisor.

Rajinikanth's former advisor Ra Arjunamurthy strongly condemned the remark and urged Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam founder Vijay to initiate action on Arjuna.

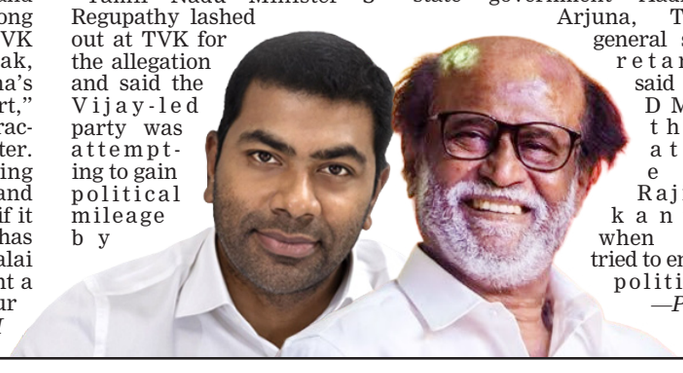
Tamil Nadu Minister S Regupathy lashed out at TVK for the allegation and said the Vijay-led party was attempting to gain political mileage by uttering a "lie."

Speaking to reporters on Friday, the Minister said Rajini was a friend of the DMK and had voiced support for the party.

"Rajinikanth cannot be threatened. Everyone knows that. To say that the DMK threatened him is a blatant lie. Vijay's party is saying it to seek political mileage," Regupathy said.

He said in 1996 election Rajini had voiced support for the DMK.

Addressing the party members at a protest against the state government Aadhav Arjuna, TVK general secretary, said the DMK threatened Rajinikanth when he tried to enter politics. —PTI



Patnaik accuses BJP of 'horse trading' in RS polls

BHUBANESWAR, 14 MARCH

Former Odisha chief minister and BJD chief Naveen Patnaik has accused the BJP of engaging in "horse trading" during the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections, calling it an offence in democracy.

His remarks follow fears of cross-voting, as five candidates contest for four seats.

BJP MLA and ex-minister Jaynarayan Mishra dismissed the allegations, stating, "We are not indulging in horse trading, and we have called upon MLAs to vote as per their conscience."

Mishra added that the BJD chief had already admitted defeat by levelling the accusations. He claimed some MLAs prefer the BJP, asserting, "The BJD is sinking, and several of its leaders prefer the BJP. The BJD exists on the wishes of the BJP central leadership." BJD MLA Byomakesh Ray accused Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi of horse trading. —PTI

— ANI

Pak drone triggers massive search in J&K's Samba

JAMMU, 14 MARCH

Security forces launched a large-scale search operation in several forward villages of Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district after a Pakistani drone crossed the International Border and entered Indian territory. The drone was observed flying over Kandral, Abtal, and Bahadurpur in Ramgarh sector late Friday night. The area remains under strict surveillance, and a major search was initiated at first light to prevent the dropping of weapons or narcotics. Recently, over 3.5kg of heroin worth Rs 20 crore was recovered in the RS Pura sector after being dropped by drones. Two suspected smugglers were detained for questioning by security forces. —PTI

Devuji calls for lifting ban on CPI(Maoist)

HYDERABAD, 14 MARCH

Former Maoist leader Thippiri Tirupati alias Devuji, who surrendered to Telangana Police, has demanded that the government lift the ban on CPI (Maoist) and recognise it as a political party, despite its opposition to electoral participation. He also called for the release of Maoist sympathisers jailed as 'urban naxals' or others, calling them "political prisoners". Devuji stated, "We don't want to participate in parliament and assembly polls," and said the Maoist organisation is already a political party. He urged the government to remove the ban and mentioned recent talks with Telangana's Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, seeking recognition for the organisation. —PTI

Rare plant found in Arunachal again after 189 years

ITANAGAR, 14 MARCH

Scientists from the Botanical Survey of India have rediscovered the rare plant Henckelia monophylla in Arunachal Pradesh, 189 years after it was last recorded. The species, endemic to the state and belonging to the Gesneriaceae family, was found in Lohit district. It is a perennial herb with erect or creeping stems, simple ovate or lance-shaped leaves, and tubular or funnel-shaped flowers. The plant reproduces via elongated capsules containing numerous tiny seeds. Chief Minister Pema Khandu praised the discovery, emphasising Arunachal's rich biodiversity and calling it a significant scientific achievement that highlights the need for ongoing conservation efforts. —PTI

— SCREENGRAB

Drugs worth Rs 36,000 crore burnt in Andamans

SRI VIJAYA PURAM, 14 MARCH

The Andaman and Nicobar Police have destroyed over 6,000 kg of methamphetamine worth Rs 36,000 crore in a nine-month operation, believed to be one of India's largest drug destructions. The process started on 26 June 2025 and concluded on 12 March 2026. The drugs were seized in November 2024 from a vessel intercepted by the Indian Coast Guard near the islands, with six Myanmarese crew members onboard. The contraband was later handed to police, and an FIR was registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act. The destruction was carried out at the INHS Dhanvantri incineration facility under a high-level committee led by DIGP Dr A Koan. —PTI

A worker arranges cylinders in Nadia in West Bengal; people queue up to collect LPG cylinders in Lucknow; a worker collects coal in a godown in the Nerul area of Navi Mumbai — PTI

LPG crisis forces migrants to exit Kerala

Hotels switch to firewood & electricity; panic buying of petrol and diesel declines

KOCHI/CHENNAI/ AHMEDABAD/KOLKATA/ LUCKNOW/RAIPUR 14 MARCH

The LPG crisis has been affecting all states. Hotels have changed over to induction stoves, firewood and natural gas. Meanwhile, the authorities are carrying out raids to check the hoarding of LPG, and are also closely monitoring the situation.

KERALA

The LPG crisis, which has led to the mass closure of hotels across Kerala, has triggered an exodus of migrant workers. There are returning to their native places as Ramzan is approaching and as elections are being held in West Bengal and Assam.

Restaurant operators are trying to retain their staff from other states, fearing that if workers leave now, they may not return until after the election.

Binoy Peter of the Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development (CMID) said that around 50 per cent of Kerala's migrant workforce comes from Assam and West Bengal.

TAMIL NADU

Some hotels operating in Tamil Nadu have commenced using alternative methods to keep the business running, officials said.

Some of the alternative methods that hoteliers are adopting are induction stoves and firewood.

A top official of a city-based popular restaurant chain told PTI, "We have moved to induction stoves."

Asked whether food prices would increase as induction stoves consume electricity, he replied in the negative.

Meanwhile, IndianOil directed fuel outlets to avoid filling petrol and diesel in "bottles and containers."

Plastic bottles and other containers can be made brittle by petrol, leading to leaks and chemical reactions, it said.

GUJARAT

The Gujarat government has decided to provide PNG (piped natural gas) connections to restaurants and educational and socio-religious institutions.

The decision was taken on Friday at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel. The meeting was informed that sufficient natural gas is available in the state for domestic use, it said.

WEST BENGAL

LPG distribution centres in Kolkata and other districts of West Bengal witnessed large queues on Saturday.

A large number of people were seen outside distribution centres from early morning in Kolkata, South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas districts.

Meanwhile, authorities have stepped up inspection across the state to curb hoarding and diversion of LPG cylinders.

The Kolkata Police have been raiding distribution centres and storage points in the last two days.

Kamarhati Municipal Councillor Bimal Saha was seen distributing cow dung cakes to people outside LPG dealerships, in what he described as a symbolic protest over the "shortage of cylinders."

The LPG supply disruption has begun affecting hospital kitchens in Kolkata. The crisis has also impacted the mid-day meal programme in schools.

UTTAR PRADESH

Uttar Pradesh's Food and Civil Supplies Department conducted raids at 1,483 locations and arrested six people to check black marketing of cooking gas.

The raids were conducted on Friday, along with the district administration.

The Food and Civil Supplies Department and the district administration are monitoring the LPG supply system. Control rooms have also been established in all districts.

CHHATTISGARH

Around 741 LPG cylinders were seized from 102 locations in Chhattisgarh.

Teams from the Food Department and district administration have been conducting inspections to curb hoarding of domestic LPG cylinders.

Adequate domestic LPG is available at these plants and bottling is being carried out at full capacity.

Oil companies have fixed a minimum gap of 25 days between two LPG refill bookings. — PTI

People queue up for LPG cylinders outside a gas agency in Uttar Pradesh's Kanpur amid the LPG shortage crisis in the country caused by the war in West Asia —PTI

Rs 2 subsidy per unit of power in TN

The Tamil Nadu government on Saturday announced a subsidy of Rs 2 per unit of electricity for restaurants, hotels and tea shops that switch to electric stoves.

At a review meeting held on Saturday, it was decided to provide a subsidy of Rs 2 per unit for the additional electricity consumed by the hotels, tea shops and cloud kitchens using induction stoves.

"This subsidy will remain in effect as long as the commercial LPG usage restrictions announced by the Centre are in place," Additional Chief Secretary J Radhakrishnan said. — PTI

India repatriates some crew of Iran ship docked at Kochi

IRIS Lavan docked at Kochi port on 4 March —ANI

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

India has repatriated the non-essential crew members of an Iranian warship that docked in Kochi on 4 March amid the escalating military conflict between Iran and the US.

Over 50 of the 183 crew members have stayed back as the ship, IRIS Lavan, remains in Kochi, officials said.

The non-essential sailors left India by a Turkish Airline aircraft. The aircraft landed in Kochi late last night after picking up the bodies from Colombo of over 80 Iranian sailors of another warship that was sunk by a US submarine off the coast of Sri Lanka on 4 March.

IRIS Lavan had developed technical issues and was granted emergency docking approval on 1 March after a request from the Iranian side.

It is learnt that the Iranian sailors of IRIS Lavan will travel to Iran by road from Yerevan, Armenia's capital.

The repatriation of the crew comes as New Delhi makes efforts to ensure safe passage for over two dozen Indian-flagged merchant vessels currently stationed on either side of the Strait of Hormuz.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi on Thursday night in the fourth such conversation since the West Asia crisis erupted. — PTI

FORCED TO JOIN ARMY

Punjab man lured to Russia with job promise dies in war

LUDHIANA, 14 MARCH

A 21-year-old man from Ludhiana, who was allegedly lured to Russia in July 2025 with a job promise, died after being deceived into joining their army and sent to the frontline in the war with Ukraine, his family said. Around six months ago he had requested help to return to India in a video on the internet.

The mortal remains of Samarjeet Singh arrived at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi on Thursday and were brought to Ludhiana, where his family performed the last rites on Friday.

Charanjit Singh, Samarjeet's father, blamed agents who lure youngsters with false job offers in Russia and then get them recruited into the Russian Army. He said his son was recruited into the Russian Army without any military training.

Charanjit said he last spoke to his son in September, after which Samarjeet went missing. Later, the family pleaded with leaders, including MLAs, for assistance to bring back their son.

The body of Samarjeet Singh was brought to Ludhiana —SCREENGRAB

- Samarjeet's father Charanjit Singh blamed unscrupulous agents who dupe youths with false offers of jobs in Russia, and then get them recruited into the Russian Army to fight in the war with Ukraine

Videos, showing Samarjeet, along with some other Indians, surfaced on social media last September appealing to the Indian government for rescuing them, claiming that they were sent to the frontline without proper training.

Charanjit, who runs a small grocery shop, revealed that his son went to Russia to support the family, and he had borrowed money to send him abroad. The family had approached many leaders seeking help to bring Samarjeet back to India.

Charanjit said that neither Russia nor the Indian and Punjab governments had reached out to the family regarding compensation for his son's death. — PTI

Curfew extended in Meghalaya's West Garo Hills district

SHILLONG, 14 MARCH

Curfew has been extended in Meghalaya's violence-hit West Garo Hills district till 6 am on Sunday, officials said.

It will be enforced across the district, with relaxation from 9 am to 3 pm on Saturday to procure essential items, according to an order issued by District Magistrate Vibhor Aggarwal.

Meanwhile, the curfew imposed on the East Garo Hills district will continue until further orders, the officials said.

Williamnagar Main Bazar in East Garo Hills will be permitted to open from 6 am to 1 pm, District Magistrate RP Marak said in another order.

During the curfew period, residents have been asked to remain indoors, with movement in the two districts prohibited, except during the relaxation hours, the officials said.

Law enforcement agencies, magistrates and police officers have been directed to strictly enforce the order and take action against violators, they said.

In view of the law and order situation, the Meghalaya government postponed the GHADC elections, which were scheduled to be held on 10 April. — PTI

BIG VICTORY, SAYS LEH APEX BODY

Ladakh leaders welcome Wangchuk's release

LEH, 14 MARCH

Leaders from Ladakh on Saturday welcomed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk's release from Jodhpur jail and demanded the release of all the remaining detainees.

Wangchuk was released from prison on Saturday after the Centre revoked his detention with immediate effect.

Ladakh MP Mohamad Hanifa hailed his release and urged the government to accept their demands for statehood and protection under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

"We welcome the release of Sonam Wangchuk. But others also need to be released, and the government should also take back the cases filed against people who participated in the protests," Hanifa told PTI.

Hanifa,

however, said protest is a Constitutional right, and urged the government to resolve the issue through dialogue.

The Leh Apex Body (LAB) described the decision of his release as a "big victory" for the people of Ladakh, saying it vindicated their stand on his innocence and removed the "anti-national" blot on the region.

LAB co-chairman Chering Dorjey said the government "saved its face" by revoking Wangchuk's detention ahead of the Supreme Court hearing later this month, asserting that the peaceful struggle for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution will continue.

Kargil-based politician and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) member Sajjad Kargili, in a post on X, demanded the immediate release of Deldan Namgial and Smanla Dorjey, and appealed to the government to drop all charges against other detainees unconditionally.

Wangchuk was detained on 26 September 2025, two days after the protests over demands for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution rocked the town of Leh. — PTI

AI cannot replace lawyers, judges: Justice Vikram

HYDERABAD, 14 MARCH

Used intelligently, AI may save time and make some aspects of legal work manageable, but it cannot replace the trained mind of a lawyer, the ethical responsibility of an officer of the court or the disciplined judgment required of a judge, Supreme Court Judge, Justice Vikram Nath said on Saturday.

Addressing a conference here, Justice Nath said technology may help draft a note, but it cannot be permitted to invent the law; at the same time, the misuse of AI cannot lead the judicial system to the opposite extreme of refusing to engage with it altogether.

Expressing concern over instances of AI-generated material having been used carelessly, even in the Supreme Court, including reference to citations that do not exist, Justice Nath said false citations strike at the integrity of legal submissions and the credibility of the adjudicatory process itself.

"But a tool must remain a tool. It cannot replace the trained mind of a lawyer, the ethical responsibility of an officer of the court or the discipline required of a judge," Justice Nath said. — PTI

It should be up to women: Experts on menstrual leave

Lawyers and activists have expressed varied views after the Supreme Court of India declined to entertain a plea seeking a nationwide menstrual leave policy, with some backing voluntary provisions while others stressing stronger legal safeguards to protect women's health and dignity.

The apex court on Friday refused to entertain the PIL, observing that no one would give them jobs in such a scenario and that such a provision would unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes.

Talking to PTI, senior advocate Karuna Nundy said a limited provision, such as one paid day of menstrual leave, could be a practical starting point.

"The range of menstrual pain, from common cramps to endometriosis, is suffered by women regardless of whether they are studying or working. So the policies should address the woman's health challenge and the variable context," she said.

"One paid day of menstrual leave, to be taken as required, would be a good start. It's like maternity leave, if you don't have a baby, don't take the leave, but you shouldn't have to pretend to be a pain-free hero when you have a cycle that literally allows the human race to perpetuate itself," Nundy added.

Activist Yogita Bhayana criticised the concerns that menstrual leave could reduce women's employment opportunities.

"This is very stupid of them to think like that. Women already deal with biological realities like pregnancy and childcare. If you deny them opportunities because of that, you should rather guide or dictate to corporates not to hamper jobs," Bhayana told PTI.

Bhayana said many women face severe pain during menstruation and should be given the option to take leave.

"There are women who suffer severe pain and cannot focus on work. Even if they report to the office, productivity is very low that day. A voluntary option for leave should definitely be given," she said.

She also said such provisions should extend to students.

"Students also go through the same pain. Sometimes, even sitting in class becomes difficult, and you cannot focus on your studies. So a voluntary option should be available for them as well," she said.

Bhayana added that governments should encourage voluntary policies even if courts have stepped back from the issue.

"Governments should take a stand and encourage voluntary policies. If the court has declined, state governments should come forward and make it happen. Women are not asking for it for fun, it is a practical issue," she said.

Bhayana said providing a voluntary option for leave would be a practical solution.

Activists said women face severe pain during menstruation and should be given the option to take leave -AI

"There are some women who don't get pain and they don't need leave. Let it be voluntary. But denying everyone the option is wrong," Bhayana said.

Ranjana Kumari, an activist, said the issue largely falls within the domain of state governments.

"This comes in the area of the state. That may be the reason the Supreme Court is not willing to talk about industrial policy. Every state needs to legislate it or make an executive order so that women who are very unwell during menstruation can take leave. This is a very important aspect of women's lives," she said.

Kumari said menstrual leave should be available but not mandatory for every woman.

"I am for menstruation leave, but voluntarily. You cannot say that every woman must take three days' leave every month. Many women may not need it. It should be available when a woman is facing pain or complications."

She said workplaces should not deny such requests.

"There should be a clear norm that if a woman asks for leave because of menstrual pain, the institution should not be allowed to say no. If they refuse, there should be a penalty against them," Kumari told PTI.

However, Kumari cautioned that policies must also consider the impact on women's employment opportunities.

"We must protect the dignity and health of women while also ensuring they do not lose employment opportunities. Otherwise, institutions may say women work only a few days a month but are paid for the whole month," she added.

Advocate Sunita Sharma supported the Supreme Court's concerns, saying mandatory menstrual leave could unintentionally affect women's employment prospects.

"I think that is right, because why should women show that we are weak as compared to men, that we can't manage those three to four days?" she said.

- A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi on Friday observed that while the intent behind the petition might be welfare-oriented, the practical reality of the job market could lead to "counter-productive" outcomes for women. "These pleas are made to create fear, to call women inferior, that menstruation is something bad happening to them... this is an affirmative right... but think about the employer who needs to give paid leave," the bench observed. Senior advocate MR Shamsad, appearing for the petitioner, said the Karnataka government has formulated a policy to allow menstrual leave and some private organisations are also providing this facility.

Sunita said menstrual cycles are a personal matter and should not become a public workplace issue.

"In the Indian scenario, this is a very personal thing pertaining to your body. Why should the whole world know that you are having this time and you can't come to the office because of that?" Sunita told PTI.

Sunita said women generally learn to manage menstrual discomfort with time and such leave could be misused.

"By the age everybody learns to cope with this. Of course, there are physical problems, but it is not so severe that you can't come to the office. At times, the leave may also be misused if someone wants to go somewhere and says she cannot come to the office because of this," she said.

According to her, if a woman faces health issues during menstruation, she should be able to take leave under existing provisions.

"If someone is not feeling well, she can take leave under sick leave, but there should not be a separate category called menstrual leave," she said.

Seema Singh, a law professor at the University of Delhi, said the issue has several social and economic dimensions.

"This is a very sensitive issue, and there are several dimensions. It is not something which is related only to menstrual hygiene or the right to health of a menstruating woman, but there are several associated issues also," Singh told PTI.

She said mandatory provisions without broader societal acceptance could affect women's employment prospects.

"Even if the Supreme Court makes it mandatory, in the private sector, employers may think their productivity will suffer and they may avoid hiring women. So who is going to suffer then?" Singh said.

She said sensitisation of society was essential before implementing legal provisions.

"Everything cannot be implemented through law. Sensitisation is very important. Until we create sensitivity in people's minds that during those days a woman may need rest, it will be difficult to implement such policies effectively," she said.

The top court, however, said the competent authority may consider the representation and examine the possibility of framing a policy on menstrual leave after consulting all relevant stakeholders. —*PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Rising fuel prices to push up airfares amid Iran war

Jet fuel prices are climbing sharply as the war in West Asia disrupts global oil supplies, putting fresh cost pressure on airlines just as the busy summer travel season approaches.

Industry experts say the question is not whether airfares will rise, but when, by how much and for how long. The impact is expected to be most visible on long-haul international routes, which consume far more fuel than shorter flights.

Several airlines outside the United States have already announced fare increases or introduced fuel surcharges to offset the higher costs. In the US, United Airlines chief executive Scott Kirby recently warned that airfare increases will "probably start quick" as rising fuel prices ripple through the aviation industry.

Why jet fuel prices are rising

The conflict has constrained oil exports and created uncertainty across global energy markets. Major producers such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq have also scaled back output as shipments face increasing disruption.

Iran has attacked commercial ships in the Persian Gulf and targeted oil infrastructure in Gulf Arab states following US and Israeli strikes. The attacks have effectively halted traffic through the Strait of Hormuz — a narrow but vital shipping route that carries roughly one-fifth of the world's oil supply.

The resulting volatility in crude oil markets has pushed up the cost of refined fuels, including jet fuel.

In the United States, the average jet fuel price reached $3.99 per gallon on Friday, up sharply from $2.50 per gallon the day before the war began two weeks ago, according to the Argus US Jet Fuel Index, which tracks prices across major US airports.

What it means for airlines

Some airlines are partly protected from sudden price spikes through fuel hedging, a financial strategy that allows carriers to lock in fuel prices months or even years in advance.

However, not all airlines hedge their fuel costs. Even those that do typically hedge only a portion of their fuel needs, meaning prolonged price increases can still force them to raise fares.

Kirby recently noted that hedging has become less common across the industry. "No one hedges anymore, and even if you do, hedging the crack spread is really hard to do," he said at a Harvard event last week.

The crack spread refers to the difference between the price of crude oil and the price of refined products such as gasoline and jet fuel.

Airlines are also facing higher operating costs because of airspace disruptions in the Middle East. Several countries have closed parts of their airspace, forcing airlines to reroute flights around conflict zones.

These longer routes increase flight times, fuel consumption and overall operating expenses.

What it means for travellers

Passengers may see the impact in several ways.

Airlines can introduce or increase fuel surcharges — additional fees added to the ticket price. These charges are common among many international carriers, particularly in Asia and Europe.

Tyler Hosford, security director at the global risk management firm International SOS, said airlines may also increase charges for optional services.

Fees for seat upgrades, extra legroom, checked baggage or priority boarding could rise as airlines look for other ways to offset higher fuel costs.

For travellers, that means the total price of a trip may increase even if the advertised base fare initially appears unchanged.

If fuel prices remain high for an extended period, airlines could also adjust their schedules or reduce certain routes, according to Christopher Anderson, a professor at Cornell University's business school who studies airline and hospitality operations.

How high airfares could go

Predicting exactly how much ticket prices might rise is difficult. The effect of higher jet fuel costs varies depending on routes, airline business models and overall travel demand.

Fuel is typically the second-largest expense for airlines after labour. It usually accounts for about 20 per cent to 25 per cent of total operating costs, according to Rob Britton, an adjunct marketing professor at Georgetown University and a retired American Airlines executive.

A sharp increase in fuel prices can therefore have a significant impact on airline budgets and profitability.

Airlines already raising prices

Most of the fare increases and fuel surcharges announced so far have come from airlines in the Asia-Pacific region, though analysts expect more carriers to follow if fuel prices remain elevated.

Hong Kong's flag carrier Cathay Pacific said it would increase its fuel surcharge starting Wednesday.

Other carriers announcing fare adjustments or surcharges include:

Air France-KLM, which said round-trip economy fares on long-haul routes could rise by about €50 (roughly $57).

Air India, which introduced fuel surcharges on certain routes and said that from 18 March the charge could increase by up to $50 on flights to Europe, North America and Australia.

Hong Kong Airlines, which has raised fuel surcharges across several routes.

FlySafair in South Africa, which has introduced a temporary fuel surcharge —*PTI*

Air India, which introduced fuel surcharges on certain routes and said that from 18 March the charge could increase by up to $50 on flights to Europe, North America and Australiar -PTI

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Spoofed at sea: GPS disruption is emerging as a maritime threat

The war in Iran has dominated global headlines with reports of airstrikes and escalating military activity. Yet beyond the immediate destruction, the conflict has revealed a quieter but rapidly growing danger: the vulnerability of ships and their crews to disruptions in satellite navigation.

Modern shipping relies heavily on GPS. When these signals are disrupted or manipulated, vessels can suddenly appear to be somewhere they are not. Ships have been shown jumping across digital maps, drifting miles inland or moving in impossible circles. In conflict zones, the risk is even greater, as vessels could be unintentionally steered into danger.

Understanding the threat requires understanding how GPS works. A GPS receiver determines its location by measuring signals transmitted from satellites orbiting Earth. By calculating how long those signals take to arrive, the receiver can pinpoint its position. But by the time they reach Earth, GPS signals are extremely weak, making them relatively easy to interfere with.

Two main forms of interference are increasingly affecting maritime navigation: jamming and spoofing.

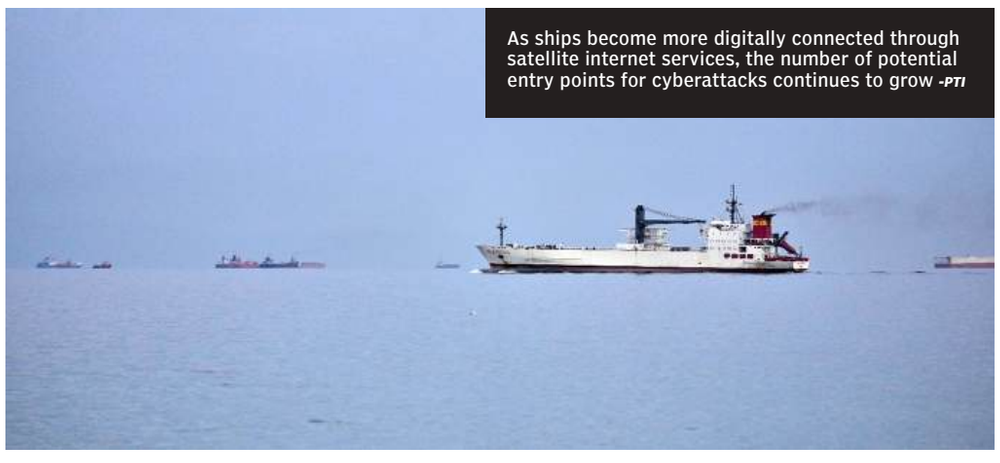
GPS jamming occurs when an attacker overwhelms legitimate satellite signals with electromagnetic noise. As a result, receivers can no longer detect the real signals and lose their position entirely. On a smartphone, the effect might look like a map freezing or jumping erratically.

Spoofing is more sophisticated and potentially more dangerous. Instead of blocking real signals, attackers broadcast fake satellite signals that mimic legitimate ones. A receiver accepts these signals and calculates a false location.

For mariners, especially those operating far from land, spoofing can be difficult to detect. The open ocean offers few landmarks that allow crews to independently confirm their position if GPS data becomes unreliable.

Near coastlines, however, the margin for error disappears. Water depths can change rapidly and hazards are common, particularly in narrow shipping routes such as the Strait of Hormuz near Iran. Reports indicate that GPS spoofing has increased in this region since the outbreak of the war.

Because ships are large and slow to manoeuvre, even small navigation errors can result in serious consequences, including collisions or groundings.



As ships become more digitally connected through satellite internet services, the number of potential entry points for cyberattacks continues to grow -PTI

One such incident occurred in May 2025 in the Red Sea. While transiting the region, the container ship MSC Antonia began displaying positions far from its actual location. To the navigation team on board, it appeared as though the vessel had suddenly jumped hundreds of miles south on the map and begun moving in a different direction.

The false positioning disoriented the crew, and the vessel eventually ran aground. The incident caused millions of dollars in damage and required a salvage operation that lasted more than five weeks.

Cases like the MSC Antonia are not isolated. Vessel-tracking data has revealed clusters of ships suddenly appearing in impossible locations, sometimes far inland or travelling in perfect circles. These anomalies are increasingly linked to GPS spoofing in regions affected by geopolitical conflict.

But satellite navigation interference is only one aspect of a broader cybersecurity challenge facing the maritime industry.

Reports from the shipping sector have documented ransomware attacks on shipping companies, supply-chain compromises and growing concerns about the security of onboard systems that control engines, propulsion and navigation equipment.

As ships become more digitally connected through satellite internet services and remote monitoring tools, the number of potential entry points for cyberattacks continues to grow.

Military vessels often address these risks through strict network segregation and regular training exercises. Some drills simulate operating with compromised communications or navigation systems. Cybersecurity experts argue that similar practices could strengthen resilience in commercial shipping, although smaller crews and limited resources make adopting military-style procedures more difficult.

Research into mariners' experiences suggests that the human element of maritime cybersecurity remains a critical weakness.

Interviews with navigation officers, engineers and other crew members responsible for ship systems reveal that cyber threats are increasingly encountered at sea, but crews often feel unprepared to deal with them.

Many mariners report that their cybersecurity training focuses almost entirely on email phishing and the risks posed by USB drives. While such precautions are relevant in office environments, they offer little guidance on how to respond when a ship's navigation or control systems behave abnormally.

As a result, crews often lack clear procedures for identifying or responding to cyber incidents at sea.

When navigation systems begin behaving strangely — such as displaying incorrect GPS positions or briefly losing signal — it can be difficult to determine whether the cause is a technical malfunction or deliberate interference.

Even when mariners suspect cyber disruption, many vessels lack established response plans. Participants in recent research frequently described situations in which crews would have to improvise if digital systems failed or produced misleading information.

Unlike mechanical failures, which are supported by established checklists and procedures, cyber incidents often fall into a grey area where responsibility and response strategies remain unclear.

Another concern raised by mariners is the decline of traditional navigation practices.

For centuries, seafarers relied on paper charts and celestial navigation to determine their position. Today, most commercial vessels depend almost entirely on electronic navigation systems.

Many mariners report that paper charts are no longer routinely carried on board, and celestial navigation is rarely practised. If GPS or other digital systems fail, crews may have limited ways to independently verify their location.

As one mariner bluntly described the risk: "If you don't have charts and you're being spoofed, you're a little screwed." —*PTI*

—SCREEGRAB

Brazil's ex-prez Bolsonaro in ICU with pneumonia

RIO DE JANEIRO, 14 MARCH

Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro is in intensive care with pneumonia. Doctor Brasil Caiado described his condition as serious, noting pneumonia over 70s can lead to septicemia, with bacteria entering the bloodstream. Bolsonaro's son Flávio said he was transferred from prison after waking with chills and vomiting. Bolsonaro, serving a 27-year sentence for attempting a coup, was admitted after high fever, low oxygen, and sweating. The hospital said he is receiving IV antibiotics and clinical support, making return to prison unlikely. Bolsonaro has previously been hospitalised after a stabbing in 2018 and falls. His conviction relates to plans to overthrow Brazil's democracy, including an alleged plot to kill Lula. —*PTI*

Pak cuts salaries for state firms amid fuel crisis

ISLAMABAD, 14 MARCH

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday approved salary deductions of 5 to 30 per cent for employees of state-owned enterprises and autonomous institutions as part of an austerity drive. The measures were cleared during a review meeting to evaluate savings plans announced earlier to address the economic fallout of the fuel crisis triggered by the ongoing US-Israel-Iran conflict. "It was decided in the meeting that, like government employees, there will be a 5-30 per cent cut in the salaries of employees of state-owned enterprises and autonomous institutions under government patronage," the statement said. The savings would be used "only for public relief". Fuel allocations for government vehicles will be reduced and foreign visits remain banned. —*PTI*

New underground security screening to start at WH

WASHINGTON, 14 MARCH

The White House aims to construct an underground centre for visitor security screening, as part of its ground overhaul. The 33,000sqft facility would be built beneath Sherman Park, positioned southeast of the White House and south of the Treasury. The plan, released on Friday, includes seven lanes to reduce wait times, with construction possibly starting in August. The facility aims to be operational by July 2028, six months before Trump's term ends. The Sherman Park monument will remain, and the project involves the White House, US Secret Service, and National Park Service. The National Capital Planning Commission will discuss the proposal on 2 April, including plans for a large ballroom where the East Wing stood. —*PTI*

11 Indian nationals charged over US visa fraud

NEW YORK, 14 MARCH

Eleven Indian nationals, living illegally in the US, have been charged with visa fraud. US federal prosecutors said the suspects organised fake robberies to allow the store clerks to falsely claim they were crime victims on Green Card applications. Among the 11 chaeged for conspiracy to commit visa fraud, Dipikaben Patel was deported after living unlawfully in Weymouth, Massachusetts. Six defendants—including Jitendrakumar and Maheshkumar Patel—were arrested in Massachusetts and released after appearing in a Boston federal court. The remaining four were apprehended in Kentucky, Missouri, and Ohio, with hearings in Boston scheduled for a later date.—*PTI*

US bombs military sites on Iran's Kharg Island

Trump threatens to target oil facilities next if Strait of Hormuz not opened soon

DUBAI, 14 MARCH

President Donald Trump said the US destroyed military sites on Iran's Kharg Island, which is vital to Iran's oil network. Trump warned that its oil infrastructure could be next if Iran continues to interfere with the passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz. Iran responded by saying that it will reduce US-linked oil facilities to "a pile of ashes".

Trump said that US forces on Friday "obliterated" targets on Kharg Island. The Speaker of the Iranian Parliament had previously warned that such strikes would provoke a new level of retaliation.

The US strikes on Iran's Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf targeted military sites but left its oil infrastructure alone for now, Trump said on Truth Social. US Central Command said that it hit 90 Iranian military targets on the island.

But Trump warned that if Iran or anyone else interferes with the passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz, he will reconsider his decision not to "wipe out the Oil Infrastructure."

The de-facto closure of the Strait, through which around a fifth of the world's seafaring oil passes, has sent oil prices skyrocketing.

On Saturday, Iran's joint military command reiterated its threat that it will attack the US-linked oil and energy facilities in the region if the Islamic Republic's oil infrastructure is hit.

US Central Command said that it hit 90 Iranian military targets on the Kharg Island on Saturday —*SCREENGRAB/CENTCOM*

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-15

Ebrahim Zolfaghari, Spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbiya Central HQ, warned they will target "all oil, economic, and energy infrastructures belonging to oil companies across the region that have American shares or cooperate with America."

Iran's semiofficial Fars news said the US strikes caused no damage to oil infrastructure on the island. It reported at least 15 explosions followed the strikes, which it said targeted an air defence facility, a naval base, the airport control tower and an offshore oil firms's helicopter hangar. —*PTI*

Iran had plans of taking over the entire Middle East, and completely obliterating Israel. Just like Iran itself, those plans are now dead!

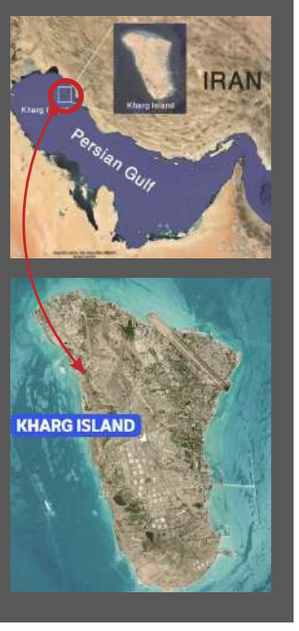
—Donald Trump, US President

Trump was duped by Netanyahu into starting the war and is now acting under his control... Iran no longer makes a "distinction" between the US and the Zionist regime.

—Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran Parliament Speaker

WHY IS THE KHARG ISLAND SO CRUCIAL?

At barely 8 km long and covering about 20 sq km of the Persian Gulf, the Khar Island is a lifeline for Iran. More than 90 percent of Iran's oil is exported through the island, which has deep seas next to it, allowing ships to dock easily. The terminal receives crude from three major offshore fields - Aboozar, Forouzan, and Dorood. Kharg typically handles between 1.3 and 1.6 million barrels of oil a day. In the weeks before the strikes, exports briefly surged close to three million barrels a day, with many reportedly going to China. Beijing accounts for nearly 80 per cent of Iran's oil exports. The island's facilities, including storage tanks, loading terminals and pipelines, act as the vital nerve centre for the sector.



USS Tripoli —*X @INDOPACOM*

US redeploys 2,500 Marines, amphibious assault ship to W Asia

DUBAI, 14 MARCH

The American military has ordered 2,500 Marines and an amphibious assault ship to the West Asia, a US official said Friday, in a major addition of forces in the region after nearly two weeks of war with Iran.

The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), as well the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli and other amphibious assault ships carrying the Marines, are based in Japan and have been in the Pacific Ocean for several days, according to images released by the military.

The MEU members are able to conduct amphibious landings, but they also specialise in bolstering security at embassies, evacuating civilians and disaster relief.

The Tripoli was spotted by commercial satellites sailing alone near Taiwan, putting it more than a week away from the waters off Iran.

Earlier in the week, the Navy had 12 ships, including the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and eight destroyers, operating in the Arabian Sea.

At least 50,000 US troops are currently operating across West Asia.

The move does not necessarily indicate that a ground invasion will take place, but hints at Washington believing that the war will take longer than it had initially anticipated estimates . —*Agencies*

THE AMPHIBIOUS USS TRIPOLI

USS Tripoli is on of the largest USS amphibious assault ships controlled by the US Navy. It is expected to arrive in West Asia from Japan in a week with the guided-missile cruiser USS Robert Smalls, the guided-missile destroyer USS Rafael Peralta and dozens of jets to boost the United States' presence.

USS TRIPOLI: GUIDED MISSILE CRUISER

- Holds the MV-22 planes, designed for amphibious assault, combat support, and medium-lift combat service support missions.
- Can carry advanced fighter jets such as F-35Bs.
- Assists in landing operations, carrying craft and armoured vehicles.
- The 2,500 Marines are trained in amphibious landings, and specialise in bolstering embassy security, evacuating civilians and disaster relief.

N Korea fires 10 missiles towards Sea of Japan

SEOUL, 14 MARCH

North Korea on Saturday fired about 10 ballistic missiles toward the eastern sea as rival South Korea conducted a joint military exercise with the US, the South said.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missiles were fired from an area near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, but didn't immediately say how far they flew. Japan's Defence Ministry said the weapons landed in waters outside the country's exclusive economic zone.

The US and South Korean militaries were conducting their annual 11-day Freedom Shield exercise exercises which involves thousands of troops.

The West Asia war has raised concerns about potential security lapses in South Korea, as local media — citing security camera footage— have speculated that the US is relocating some missile defence assets stationed in the country to around Iran, warning that it may embolden the North.

—AI

South Korea's President's office had said that it could not confirm nor deny if the US had in fact moved the expensive interceptor missiles from its Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in Seongju to West Asia. —*PTI*

US announces $10m for info on Mojtaba

The US State Department has announced a bounty of USD 10 million for intelligence leading to Iran's new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, alongside several other high-ranking Iranian officials. The move comes despite Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth claiming that Khamenei was "disfigured". The programme's updated list includes Iran's Interior minister and the Minister of Intelligence and Security.

Houthis to join war at 'right time'

Yemen's Houthis, the Iranian-backed militia group said that they had "one finger on the trigger" and were waiting for the right time to join the war, Iranian state-run media reported. Houthis spokesperson Mohammed al-Bukhaiti said that the group - which has been silent during the war – is in close coordination with the "Axis of Resistance", which includes Iranian-backed groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

A building lies completely destroyed following Israeli-US strikes in Iran. People walk along a street blocked by the rubble of a building destroyed in an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs in Lebanon — *IRNA/PTI*

Strikes continue as toll rises in W Asia

DUBAI, 14 MARCH

As the US-Israel war on Iran entered its third week on Saturday, with no signs of a letup, strikes continued across West Asia, wreaking havoc on military and civilian infrastructure alike.

FIRE IN IRAQ

A missile struck a helipad inside the US Embassy compound in Baghdad and debris. Images showed smoke rising over the embassy compound in the Iraqi capital.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the strike. The sprawling embassy complex, one of the largest US diplomatic facilities in the world, has been repeatedly targeted by rockets and drones fired by Iran-aligned militias.

On Friday, the embassy renewed its Level 4 security alert for Iraq, warning that Iran and Iran-aligned militia groups "may continue to target them".

OIL HIT IN UAE

A fire broke out in United Arab's Fujairah port after what authorities said was a drone interception. The port is the UAE's largest on its eastern seaborn. While no injuries were reported, the port allegedly halted its operations.

The Iranian joint military command also threatened to attack cities in the UAE, saying the US used "ports, docks and hideouts" there to launch strikes on the islands.

It called on people to evacuate those areas where it said US forces were sheltering

Meanwhile, The Saudi Ministry of Defence announced that its air defence forces have successfully neutralised 50 drones in the northern part of the country.

ISRAEL HAMMERS IRAN

At least six civilians, including a six-month-old baby were killed by airstrikes on Iran's Ilam province, state media reported.

Israel said its air force had hit more than 200 targets in the last 24 hours, including missile launchers, defence systems and weapons production sites. At least 1,300 Iranians have been killed so far.

- Some 1,00,000 Israeli troops have amassed at the UN-mandated Blue Line, which divides the Israel and Lebanon in an anticipated ground invasion.

BLOOD IN LEBANON

Some 1,00,000 Israeli troops have amassed along the UN-mandated Blue Line, which divides the Israel and Lebanon in an anticipated ground invasion. Many fear the Israel-Hezbollah conflict could continue beyond the Iran war, with Israeli officials publicly toying with the idea of annexation.

Some 12 medical workers were killed by Israeli strikes in Lebanon, the Lebanese health ministry Nearly 800 people have been killed in Lebanon by Israel, at least 100 were children.

At least 8,50,000 people in Lebanon have been displaced, just over a year since the last conflict uprooted over a million Lebanese from their homes. That's one in every seven people.

France said it would host peace talks between Israel and Lebanon. —*Agencies*

'BEST PALS'

Andrew and Mandelson pictured in bathrobes with Epstein

LONDON/WASHINGTON, 14 MARCH

Former prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor and Peter Mandelson have been pictured in bathrobes with convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, in the first known photo of them together.

ITV News said the photo was taken in Martha's Vineyard in the US allegedly between 1999 and 2000, before Epstein was sentenced to prison and registered as a sex offender.

The newly discovered photo is seemingly in the same location as another featured in Epstein's 2003 "birthday book," alongside a message from Mandelson, where he called Epstein his "best pal".

Former prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor and UK former ambassador Peter Mandelson in bathrobes with Jefferey Epstein —*US DOJ*

Ties to the late financier have cost both men their roles: Andrew was stripped of his royal titles, and Mandelson was sacked as the UK's ambassador to the US. Both have since been arrested and released under investigation on suspicion of misconduct in public office in connections to the convicted sex offender.

Andrew has denied any wrongdoing in relation to Epstein, and Mandelson has maintained that he has not committed any crime.

Andrew has been accused of having sex with Virginia Giuffre when she was a teenager. A civil case brought by Giuffre was settled with no admission of guilt, and he has strenuously denied the allegations. —*Agencies*

Pakistan shoots down Afghan drones

ISLAMABAD/KABUL, 14 MARCH

Pakistani forces reported that intercepted Afghan drones near Islamabad, injured four, including two children.

The army said "Pakistan is clear about the true nature and intentions of the terrorist militia-for-hire ruling Afghanistan," and vowed to continue Operation Ghazab lil-Haq until Kabul addresses terrorism concerns.

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said it launched retaliatory strikes along the Durand Line. The UN reported at least four civilian deaths and 14 injuries, including women and children, during the clashes.

Relations remain strained, between the two, with Pakistan accusing Kabul of harbouring militants and Afghanistan responding with military actions. —*Agencies*

Russian strike on Kyiv kills 4, injures 15

KYIV, 14 MARCH

A combined missile and drone attack on the Kyiv region killed at least four people and wounded at least 15 on Saturday. The attack targeted four districts, damaging residential buildings, educational institutions, and critical infrastructure, said Mykola Kalashnyk, Head of the Regional State Administration. Three injured are in critical condition.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the main target for the overnight strikes was "the energy infrastructure of the Kyiv region." He said Russia launched around 430 drones of various types during the night, as well as 68 missiles.

Zelenskyy on Saturday called on Kyiv's Western partners to pay "one hundred per cent attention" to the need to boost the production of air defence missiles as attention drifted to the US-Israeli war on Iran.

—UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICE

"Russia will try to exploit the war in the Middle East to cause even greater destruction here in Europe, in Ukraine," he said on social media. He had earlier criticised the US decision to grant a 30-day waiver on loans for Russian oil.

Meanwhile, on Saturday, Ukrainian drones hit an oil refinery and port in Russia's Krasnodar region, Russian officials reported. —*PTI*

Axis Bank fined ₹3.19 crore over demonetised notes

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) has directed Axis Bank to pay Rs 3.19 crore to Procure Logistics Services Pvt Ltd for "deficiency in service" during the 2016 demonetisation. The bank repeatedly refused to accept demonetised notes for deposit after the government's 8 November, 2016, notice, despite the company's requests. The commission noted that nothing prevented the bank from accepting the cash and reporting suspicions to authorities. The order stated, "The outright denial deprived the complainant of the only lawful opportunity to deposit the demonetised currency." Axis Bank was ordered to pay Rs 3.19 crore with simple interest from 30 December 2016, within two months, or face higher interest on delay. —*PTI*

JSW to develop coking coal mine in Mozambique

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

JSW Steel announced plans to develop the Minas de RevuboÃ¨ coking coal mine in Mozambique's Tete Province, with reserves of 850 million tonnes and a potential yield of 250 MT of usable coal. The first phase, over 2.5 years, aims to produce 2.4 million tonnes annually of prime hard coking coal. This project aligns with JSW's backward integration strategy, ensuring long-term raw material security amid limited Indian resources. Parth Jindal said, "As we grow to 50 MTPA steel capacity in India by 2030, this asset will provide strategic raw material security and support sustainable growth." The mine's development aims to diversify sources and reduce reliance on volatile global coking coal prices. —*PTI*

Sugar prices drop due to surplus from Brazil: ICRA

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

International sugar prices declined sharply due to surplus supply from Brazil, with prices falling below India's domestic costs, according to ICRA. Raw sugar prices dropped from USD 445 per tonne in February 2025 to USD 313 in February 2026, while white sugar fell from USD 532 to USD 408. The global production estimate for SY2025-26 is 189.3 million tonnes, about 5 per cent higher than last year, with consumption at 178.1 million tonnes. India's sugar production is projected to increase by 9.4 per cent, reaching 32.41 million tonnes, with net sugar remaining at 29.3 million tonnes after ethanol diversion. The sector's margins are expected to stay around 10-10.5 per cent, supported by higher cane availability and stable prices. —*ANI*

— WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Ekta Kapoor launches talent management firm

MUMBAI, 14 MARCH

Noted Indian producer Ekta Kapoor on Saturday announced the launch of her new talent management company, Hoonur, which aims to nurture artists and strengthen the culture of storytelling and performance in the entertainment industry. Hoonur will boast of a diverse roster of celebrated actors and creators from across Bollywood and Indian television. The initiative is designed to provide artists with strategic guidance, focused representation, and a collaborative ecosystem. Kapoor, known for backing films like 'Love Sex Aur Dhokha', 'The Dirty Picture', 'Veere Di Wedding', 'Crew', and TV shows like 'Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi', 'Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii', said she aims to provide a platform to artists where their talent will flourish. —*PTI*

Crude oil prices surge by 40% since start of war

The price shot up to $103/barrel as Iran keeps Hormuz shut

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Crude oil prices in the international market have surged by more than 40 per cent in just 15 days amid the ongoing war involving the United States, Israel and Iran, which has disrupted the energy supply route through the Strait of Hormuz and affected global energy markets, particularly in Asia.

Before the beginning of the war, crude oil prices in international markets on 27 February were trading at around USD 73 per barrel. However, by Saturday, prices had surged sharply to around USD 103 per barrel.

The rise from USD 73 to USD 103 per barrel represents an absolute increase of USD 30 and a percentage increase of approximately 41.1 per cent in a short span of time.

The recent intense military conflict between the U.S. and Iran began on 28 February, when US and Israeli forces launched wide-ranging, direct attacks on Iranian military assets and leadership. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was also killed in the US-Israel-led strikes.

Before the beginning of the war, crude oil prices in international markets on 27 February were trading at around $73 per barrel —*ANI*

The sharp jump in prices reflects growing concerns about global energy supply disruptions as the conflict escalates in the Middle East, with the Strait of Hormuz playing a crucial role in global oil transportation.

Market experts say that developments related to the conflict will continue to influence global markets in the coming days.

Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, said the coming week is expected to remain highly volatile as investors closely track geopolitical developments. He added that such developments will play a crucial role in determining crude oil price trends, global bond yields and currency market volatility. According to him, particular focus will remain on the Strait of Hormuz.

Any prolonged disruption to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz could tighten global oil supplies, influence inflation expectations across Asia and keep overall market risk sentiment fragile. —*ANI*

Rupee to remain volatile amid geopolitical tension: UBI report

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Indian rupee is expected to remain volatile throughout March as geopolitical tensions and global economic factors continue to exert pressure on the currency, the Union Bank of India (UBI) said.

A report by the bank noted that the Indian rupee (INR) recently touched a historic low of Rs 92.48 per dollar on 13 March, reflecting the impact of both global and domestic developments on the currency market.

The West Asia conflict has raised concerns over possible disruptions to global energy supply routes, pushing crude oil prices higher.

India, being a major oil importer, remains vulnerable to such price shocks.

Higher crude prices can widen the country's trade deficit and current account deficit while also increasing the demand for dollars from oil marketing companies.

Sustained portfolio outflows or a prolonged risk-off environment in global financial markets could further weigh on the currency.

In the near term, the rupee has remained range-bound, with exporters selling dollars at elevated levels. This has helped limit a sharper fall in the currency. —*ANI*

AFTER AIR INDIA & INDIGO

Akasa Air to levy ₹199-₹1,300 as fuel surcharge

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

- Akasa Air said it would levy a fuel surcharge for each flight, & quantum would vary based on the duration of the flight.

After Air India and Indigo, Akasa Air will levy fuel surcharges ranging from Rs 199 to Rs 1,300 on domestic and international flight tickets from 15 March due to the spike in jet fuel prices amid the West Asia conflict.

Air India, Air India Express and IndiGo have started levying similar charges on domestic and international flight tickets.

In a statement on Saturday, Akasa Air said it would levy a fuel surcharge for each flight, and the quantum would vary based on the duration of the flight. "Akasa Air will introduce a fuel surcharge ranging from Rs 199 to Rs 1,300 on our domestic and international routes, for all bookings that are made with effect from 12.01am on 15 March, 2026," it said.

According to the airline, there has been a significant increase in the price of aviation turbine fuel, driven by evolving geopolitical developments in West Asia.

"As fuel represents a significant portion of airline operating costs, this impacts the cost of operations across the aviation industry," it said.

Further, Akasa Air said it would continue to closely monitor the operating environment and review the fuel surcharge periodically. —*PTI*

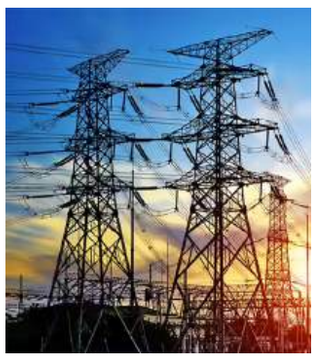
Maharashtra's industries seek power tariff cut amid Iran war

C'SAMBHAJINAGAR, 14 MARCH

Industrial bodies in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar have demanded a reduction of Rs 5 per unit in electricity tariffs, citing soaring production costs amid the ongoing West Asia crisis.

Earlier this week, the administration in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar asked industrial associations to present a list of demands, which was then handed over to State Industries Minister Uday Samant during a meeting.

Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, a key business hub in the state's Marathwada region, is home to automobile, engineering, pharmaceutical and steel industries.



The war between the US, Israel and Iran has hit the supply of fuel, raising the cost of production in these industries.

Samant on Thursday said that the industries in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar have gas stocks for between three and 12 days, but operations should not stop.

In their list of demands, the Chamber of Marathwada Industries and Agriculture (CMIA), the Marathwada Association of Small Scale Industries and Agriculture (MASSIA), among other organisations, sought a reduction in electricity tariff by Rs 5 per unit.

They have cited that the rise in the prices of raw materials has increased production costs, and the reduction in electricity costs will provide relief to the sector, which has been hit by the West Asia war.

Industries have also sought a moratorium on loan repayments, pending aid and subsidy, and fast-tracking of permits for alternative fuels. —*PTI*

Kerala to acquire 230 acres for Vizhinjam Port development

T'PURAM, 14 MARCH

The Kerala government has decided to acquire 230 acres of land, costing approximately Rs 810 crore, for development activities related to the Vizhinjam International Seaport.

The decision was made during a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday, according to an official statement.

The land will be acquired in Kottukal, Maranallur, and Amaravila areas, under the provisions of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (LARR Act). The cabinet also approved the utilisation of Rs 283.68 crore from the Plan Scheme Treasury Saving Bank account of Vizhinjam International Seaport Ltd (VISL) for the land acquisition. The remaining funds will be obtained from currently approved NABARD loan, it added.

— PTI

Additionally, the cabinet permitted VISL to undertake all activities related to port-led industrialisation on the 230 acres of land to be acquired. The government also decided to formulate a policy for the safety and rehabilitation of street children in Kerala, in response to a 2022 Supreme Court order. —*PTI*

CRUDE PRICES ADDING NEW RISKS

El Nino, global tension pose inflation risk: SBI

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Weather patterns along with ongoing geopolitical risks affecting global energy prices, could adversely impact inflation in 2026, according to a report by the State Bank of India.

The report highlighted that the recent global weather forecasts indicate a possible build-up of El Nino in 2026.

The Nino 3.4 sea surface temperature (SST) index shows that the El Nino-Southern Oscillation is currently in a neutral phase but may transition to a positive phase in 2026. Such weather developments could have a significant impact on agriculture and food supply, which in turn may influence inflation.

The report said that the West Asia conflict has also disrupted production, while the lack of adequate storage capacity has resulted in oil being held on water. This added pressure on commodity markets.

Meanwhile, a report by SBI Funds Management said rising geopolitical tensions and elevated crude oil prices are adding new risks to the macroeconomic environment and could create upward inflation pressure. It could influence the policy response of the Reserve Bank of India across various market segments. RBI's presence in both the forex and rates markets has helped anchor market yields. —*ANI*

Meta to lay off 20% of workforce

CALIFORNIA, 14 MARCH

- A 20 per cent staff reduction would mark Meta's largest-ever round of layoffs, surpassing the cumulative 21,000 jobs cut during its 2022–2023 "year of efficiency" restructuring.

Meta is planning record layoffs of up to 20 per cent—over 15,000 employees—to offset surging AI infrastructure costs as part of a broader push towards leaner AI-assisted operations. The layoffs are intended to offset the enormous costs of Meta's AI infrastructure projects.

The layoff news follows the reported delay of Meta's next-generation AI model, 'Avocado', which has been pushed back from March to at least May. The postponement stems from internal benchmarks showing the model underperforms against industry leaders like Google's Gemini.

A 20 per cent staff reduction would mark Meta's largest-ever round of layoffs, surpassing the cumulative 21,000 jobs cut during its 2022–2023 "year of efficiency" restructuring.

Meta CEO **Mark Zuckerberg** said projects that once required large teams can now be done by a single highly talented person, as the company spends hundreds of millions to recruit AI researchers for its superintelligence team.

Meta has pledged at least USD 600 billion toward US infrastructure by 2028, a massive investment aimed at constructing the next generation of AI data centers.

Meta's 2026 capital expenditure is projected at USD135 billion, which is nearly double USD 72 billion spent in 2025.

The layoffs come as Meta expands aggressively, recently acquiring Moltbook and Manus for about USD 2 billion, and investing USD 14.3 billion in Scale AI last June, bringing its founder Alexandr Wang on as Chief AI Officer. —*Agencies*

Demand for coal rises in Jaipur amid cylinder shortage

JAIPUR, 14 MARCH

The demand for coal has surged amid a shortage of commercial LPG cylinders, with several dhabas and small eateries switching to traditional coal-fired "bhattis" to keep their kitchens running.

The spike in demand is particularly visible in the congested lanes of the walled city of Jaipur, where many traditional dhabas and small restaurants operate open kitchens that can accommodate coal-based cooking.

Coal and firewood are both used by many roadside eateries and traders said the demand for wood has also risen along with that for coal.

Meanwhile, the impact of the fuel shortage is also being felt at the city's CNG stations, where long queues of autorickshaws were seen waiting to refill gas. —*PTI*

LOW ADOPTION AMONG USERS

Instagram to discontinue encrypted chats from May

ALIFORNIA, 14 MARCH

Instagram has decided to discontinue its end-to-end encrypted direct messages from 8 May, said sources.

According to sources, Instagram's parent firm, Meta, confirmed the change in its direct message feature.

A spokesperson said the company decided to discontinue the feature due to its low use among users.

End-to-end encryption is a communication security method in which messages are encoded so that only the sender and the receiver have access to the contents, keeping it secure from the intermediaries, including the service provider.

This means that Instagram's private chats will no longer have the level of security the messenger app used to have.

- End-to-end encryption is a communication security method in which messages are encoded so that only the sender and the receiver have access to the contents

This also means that the parent company may be able to have access to the message and its contents.

Instagram said that an in-app notification will be sent to users who are using end-to-end encrypted messaging, where it will request users to export or download the messages and media they want before the deadline.

This move has triggered a discussion among privacy experts as the end-to-end encryption is seen as one of the most effective safeguards for securing digital communications against hacking and unauthorised monitoring.

Meanwhile, certain government and child protection groups say that the encrypted messaging services can limit the ability of authorities to identify illegal and unlawful activities or harmful materials shared online.

The Verge, a technology news website, said that Instagram first introduced encrypted messaging in the end of 2023 as part of Meta's privacy push. —*Agencies*

-PTI

Mannepalli loses to Ginting; Indian campaign ends

BASEL, 14 MARCH

India's Tharun Mannepalli put up a gallant fight before going down to Indonesia's Anthony Sinisuka Ginting in a thrilling three-game quarterfinal at the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here. The world No. 43 Indian lost 19-21, 21-19, 13-21 to Ginting, who is returning from injuries that marred his 2025 season, including a significant back problem. The defeat also brought the curtains down on India's campaign at the USD 250,000 tournament. Ginting opened up a 6-2 lead early, and though Mannepalli clawed back to level at 11-11, the Indonesian pulled away to 16-12 before earning four game points.—*PTI*

No player has been fined for T20 WC exit: PCB

LAHORE, 14 MARCH

The Pakistan Cricket Board on Saturday denied the imposition of fines on members of its T20 World Cup squad for not reaching the semifinals of the tournament. Amir Mir, the PCB spokesperson, refuted the reports to that effect that appeared in a section of the media. "No player has been fined, but yes, the board is thinking about working out a formula for players because they get a lot of incentives when they perform well," Mir told reporters here. Mir noted that each player now earns close to PKR 6-7 crores, so the board is contemplating making them responsible for their performances.—*PTI*

Indian long jumper Lokesh claims top spot

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Young Indian athlete Lokesh Sathyanathan achieved a major milestone in his fledgling career by winning the gold medal in the men's long jump at the NCAA IndoorChampionships in Fayetteville, Arkansas. With a leap of 8.21m, he set a new indoor national record and moved to third on the all-time list of Indian long jumpers, behind Jeswin (8.42m) and Murali Sreeshankar (8.41m).Lokesh, who is enrolled at Tarleton State University, set an indoor national record of 8.21m on his way to clinching the top podium spot in the fourth attempt of the final. Lokesh finished ahead of De'Aundre Ward of the University of Southern Mississippi, who leapt 8.20m to claim the second spot, and Tafadzwa of Kansas State University, who finished third with a jump of 8.15m.—*PTI*

-PTI

This could be Dhoni's last season: Irfan

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan believes the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League could be the "last time" fans see MS Dhoni turning out for Chennai Super Kings. As the 2026 IPL approaches, the discussions surrounding Dhoni's retirement have once again intensified. Speculation intensified after CSK traded Sanju Samson to the Rajasthan Royals. This move, many felt, could allow the veteran to minimise his on-field involvement further this season while continuing to mentor the side. CSK is incomplete without MS Dhoni. This season might be the last time we see him in the yellow jersey, and it's tough to imagine CSK and the IPL without him," Irfan said on JioHotstar's 'Game Plan'.—*PTI*

England defeats India 2-0 in Women's Hockey final

Women in Blue had already sealed a World Cup berth

HYDERABAD, 14 MARCH

India suffered a 0-2 defeat in their summit clash against England in the FIH Women's Hockey World Cup Qualifiers 2026 in Hyderabad on Saturday.

The Women in Blue had already sealed a World Cup berth, but were unable to sign off from the tournament on a high as the visiting English side produced a tactically superior performance.

Grace Balsdon and Elizabeth Neal were the goal-scorers for England, while India's drag-flick experts failed to fire on the night.

India's woes compound as England double their lead in the 43rd minute. The goal is credited to Elizabeth Neal. The hosts plead insistently to the umpire that Neal's pass came from outside the circle.

However, the Salima Tete-led side had already secured its spot in the World Cup, which will be played in Belgium and the Netherlands in August this year.Grace Baldson put England ahead in the 13th minute before Elizabeth Neal found the second goal in the 43rd minute to put the game beyond India's reach.India was once again wasteful in front of the goal, had three penalty corners, but failed to convert any.

Scotland edged past Italy 1-0 on Saturday to become the third team to qualify from the second leg of the FIH Women's World Cup Qualifiers in Hyderabad.

India and England are the other two teams through.The World Cup, scheduled to be held in Belgium and the Netherlands from August 15 to 30, will feature 16 teams.The two host countries, along with five continental champions and the winners of the FIH Pro League in 2023-24 and 2024-25, secured automatic qualifications.For the remaining seven teams, FIH conducted two sets of qualifiers, with the top three from each advancing.

The last team will be the higher-ranked fourth-placed team from the two qualifiers.

In the first World Cup Qualifier in Chile, the host nation, Australia, and Ireland were the top three teams and secured qualification. In the Hyderabad leg, India, England, and Scotland made it to the global showpiece.

Japan advanced as the better-ranked fourth-placed team to complete the 16-team line-up. —*PTI*

NAMAN AWARDS

BCCI to felicitate T20 WC-winning Indian team

MUMBAI, 14 MARCH

The Suryakumar Yadav-led Indian team, which scripted history by winning the T20 World Cup, will be felicitated by the BCCI during its annual 'Naman Awards' ceremony here on Sunday.

The highlight of the BCCI Naman Awards 2026 will be the felicitation of all five Indian teams that have captured ICC titles recently, a historic first, the Indian cricket board announced on Saturday.

The Gautam Gambhir-coached side defeated New Zealand by 96 runs in the final in Ahmedabad on 8 March to become the first team to win the T20 World Cup three times, the first to successfully defend the title and the first to achieve the feat on home soil.

The ceremony will also honour the other Indian sides who lifted ICC trophies in the recent past, including the senior women's team that won the ODI World Cup 2025, the men's team that clinched the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, the Under-19 Cricket World Cup 2026 and the women's U-19 T20 World Cup team of 2025.

Meanwhile, the BCCI officially confirmed several individual honours that had been announced earlier this week.

India's Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill will receive the Polly Umrigar Award for Best International Cricketer (Men) for the 2024-25 season, while Smriti Mandhana will be honoured as the Best International Cricketer (Women) for the fifth time in her career.

Former stalwarts Roger Binny and Rahul Dravid will be conferred the Col. C.K. Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award, the board's highest honour. —*PTI*

21-POINT SYSTEM HAS WORKED WELL: SAINA NEHWAL

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Olympic medallist Saina Nehwal has urged the Badminton World Federation (BWF) to exercise caution regarding proposed scoring changes, maintaining that the current 21-point system preserves the sport's essential intensity and endurance.

The game's governing body (BWF) has proposed switching to a 3x15 scoring format from the current 3x21 system, with a membership vote on the change scheduled at the BWF Annual General Meeting in Horsens, Denmark, on April 25.

"Badminton has a rich tradition, and tournaments like the All England Open Badminton Championships and the BWF World Championships have always been special because of their intensity and endurance factor," Saina, who joined the advisory board of India's International Movement to the United Nations (I.I.M.U.N.), told PTI in an interview.

"Any change in scoring or format should be carefully considered. The current 21-point system has worked well, and players have adapted to it over many years.

"If changes are introduced, they should ensure that the quality of rallies and the competitive balance of the sport are not affected. At the end of the day, the focus should remain on fair competition and the spirit of the game."

According to the revamped BWF World Tour, the five Super 1000 tournaments, to be staged across Asia and Europe, will feature a new singles format: 48 players competing in a group stage, followed by knockout rounds. —*PTI*

Indian Wells 2026: Aryna sets up summit clash with Rybakina

INDIAN WELLS, 14 MARCH

Aryna Sabalenka surged past Linda Noskova on Friday to secure a spot in the Indian Wells final, where she'll face Australian Open champion Elena Rybakina.

Sabalenka defeated the 14th-ranked Czech Noskova 6-3, 6-4, while Rybakina overcame Ukraine's Elina Svitolina 7-5, 6-4, setting up an exciting rematch of their Melbourne final.

Rybakina had previously beaten Sabalenka in the 2023 Indian Wells championship match, where the Belarusian star had twice reached the final without success.

"I want that match," said Sabalenka, who has been in dominant form in the California desert this year.

Bhambri-Goransson's dream run ends in semifinals

Indian doubles ace Yuki Bhambri and his Swedish partner Andre Goransson's impressive campaign came to an end after losing in the semi-finals of the Indian Wells Masters in California.

The unseeded pair lost 5-7, 7-6(7), 5-10 to France's Arthur Rinderknech and Monaco's Valentin Vacherot in a closely fought contest decided by a tie-breaker. —*PTI*

MAYANK BECOMES INDIA'S 94TH CHESS GRANDMASTER

KOLKATA, 14 MARCH

Mayank Chakraborty became the 94th Indian to secure the title of chess Grandmaster after scoring his final norm during the Hotel Stockholm North by First Hotels Young Talents tournament in Sweden. He achieved the title after beating Philip Lindgren in the eighth round, bagging his final GM norm with a round to spare.

He went on to win the tournament with a rating performance of 2670. He scored 7.0/9, finishing one point ahead of the entire field, which in turn took his live rating to 2508. England's Jonah Willow B and Norway's Aksel Bu Kvaloy finished second and third, respectively. Hailing from Assam, 16-year-old Mayank becomes the first player from the NorthEast region to gain the GM status. —*PTI*

KKR took wrong decision to let Iyer and Salt leave, says Kumble

MUMBAI, 14 MARCH

Kolkata Knight Riders "took the wrong decision" by letting Shreyas Iyer and Phil Salt leave after their title-winning campaign in 2024, and unless the three-time IPL champions understand the importance of retaining key players, they cannot be considered serious title contenders, cautioned the legendary Anil Kumble.

Iyer exited KKR to join Punjab Kings, whom he led to their first appearance in the IPL final in nearly a decade in the last edition, while Phil Salt another vital cog in KKR's success in 2024 moved to Royal Challengers Bengaluru, where he played an impactful role in the franchise's maiden title win last year.

"Two years ago, KKR won the IPL and lifted their third trophy. Two important cogs in that wheel were Shreyas Iyer and Phil Salt. Both played crucial roles in helping them win, but KKR let both of them go," Kumble noted in a JioHotstar release.

"There is no consistency from them in terms of player retention. KKR took the wrong decision by letting Shreyas Iyer and Phil Salt leave, and that has left them without an IPL-winning captain." Kumble noted that even though KKR has an experienced campaigner in Ajinkya Rahane as their skipper, he has not yet won the IPL as a captain. "Yes, Ajinkya Rahane is an experienced campaigner. He has led Mumbai in domestic cricket and Rajasthan Royals in the IPL. But he has not lifted the IPL title as (a) captain (yet)," Kumble said. "Having a skipper who has won the trophy gives you an advantage. KKR let go of that advantage. —*PTI*

4 Indians reach finals of World Boxing Futures Cup

BANGKOK, 14 MARCH

India's young boxers continued their impressive run at the World Boxing Futures Cup 2026, with Chandrika, Gunjan, Joyshree Devi, and Ambekar Meetei advancing to the finals after registering convincing victories in their semifinal bouts here on Saturday.

In the women's 51kg category, Chandrika delivered a strong performance to beat Rihab Hamdoune of Morocco by Referee Stopped Contest (RSC) in Round 2, sealing her place in the gold-medal bout.

In the women's 48kg category, Gunjan delivered a dominant performance to defeat North Korea's Yu Gyong Kim by a 5-0 verdict.

Joyshree Devi (54kg) produced another commanding display, outclassing Mexico's Sofia Ramirez by Referee Stopped Contest (RSC) in the first round to secure her spot in the final.

In the men's 50kg category, Ambekar Meetei also advanced to the final after registering a 5-0 unanimous decision victory over Uzbekistan's Abdugani Yorkinjonov.

Meanwhile, Radhamani Longjam (57kg) fought a closely-contested bout but went down 2-3 to Ukraine's Yevanhelina Petruk in the semifinals, finishing with a bronze medal. The World Boxing Futures Cup, being held in Bangkok from March 8 to 15, features promising youth boxers from across the world competing in the Youth Olympic weight categories, providing valuable international exposure for the next generation of pugilists. —*PTI*

US aims for historic clean sweep in Olympics

MILAN, 14 MARCH

The United States is looking to do something no nation has ever done: Clean sweep the ice hockey tournaments at the Olympics and Paralympics.

Standing in the way? Canada again. Just like in the men's and women's tournaments at the Olympics, Sunday's gold medal match in Para ice hockey will be between the U.S. and Canada.

"We've got to do our part, right? So they got the two done, so now it's our job, and we just got to bring it home for them," U.S. forward Kevin McKee told The Associated Press. Naturally, Canada wants bragging rights in the rivalry and to break American Para hearts.

"It is a source of pride for us just to win, like we believe Canada is THE hockey country and we want to prove that," Canada forward Adam Dixon said.

Both teams dominated the group stage at the Paralympics, each winning all three of their matches. The US then beat the Czech Republic 6-1 in Friday's semifinals. —*PTI*

CHINESE GP SPRINT

George Russell edges out Charles Leclerc

SHANGHAI, 14 MARCH

George Russell claimed a Sprint victory at the Chinese Grand Prix -*PTI*

George Russell won a breathless sprint for Mercedes on Saturday at the Chinese Grand Prix, with the first 100km dash in the new era of Formula One witnessing a late safety car and multiple lead changes. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was second, and his teammate Lewis Hamilton, who won the sprint in Shanghai 12 months ago, crossed the line third to complete the podium. A safety car on lap 13 of the 19 saw the entire field dive into the pits for fresh tyres, with leader Russell emerging still in front. Kimi Antonelli in the second Mercedes had been third but served a 10-second penalty in the pit lane for causing an earlier collision, which dropped him to seventh place, and he eventually finished fifth.

World champion Lando Norris was fourth in his McLaren, and his teammate Oscar Piastri was sixth.

Liam Lawson in his RB, and Oliver Bearman in the Haas were seventh and eighth respectively to round out the points scorers.

The Ferrari of Hamilton earlier had a brilliant launch off the start line, moving from fourth to second and then swapping the lead with Russell twice on the opening lap.

Hamilton emerged in front early on the second lap as his teammate Leclerc put pressure on Russell.

Antonelli in the second Mercedes had a disastrous start, dropping from the front row alongside pole-sitter Russell all the way down to seventh. —*PTI*